

VEROTCHKA'S TALES

MAMIN-SIBERIAK



1840-1850



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for Louise:

With much love from
Aunt Florence,
Uncle Frank and
Dudley.

December 25, 1926.



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VEROTCHKA'S TALES



VEROTCHKA'S T A L E S

by

**MAMIN =
SIBERIAK**

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VEROTCHKA'S TALES





HOW THEY HAPPENED



ULLA-LULLABY. Verotchka's one little eye is sleeping, the other little eye is still open. Verotchka's one little ear is sleeping, the other little ear is still listening. Sleep, Verotchka, sleep, my pretty one, and father will tell you these stories. I think they are all here. The Siberian cat, Vasca; the shaggy village dog, Postoika; the gray mousie-gnawers; the cricket behind the stove; the iridescent starling in the cage; and the cock, the bully.

Sleep, Verotchka, the story begins. The full moon in the heaven looks into the window. The cock-eyed rabbit hops



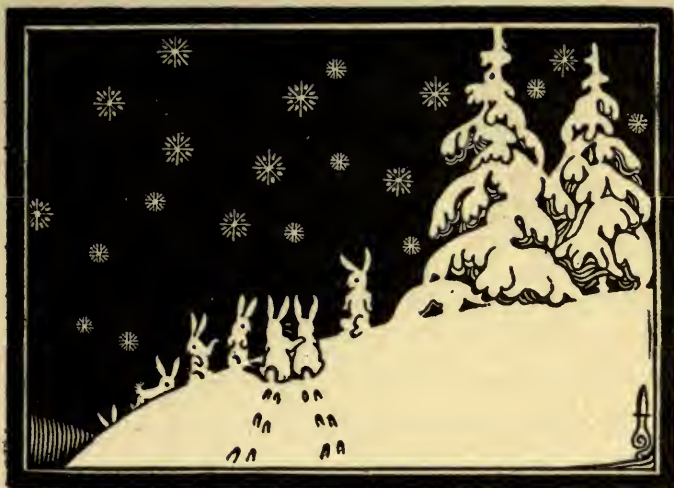


on his haunches and the wolf's eyes flash yellow fire lights. The bear, Mishka, is sucking his paw, and the old sparrow flies up to the window, pecks the pane with his bill, and asks, "How soon, now?"

I think they're all here now, waiting for Verotchka's Tale.

Verotchka's one little eye is asleep, the other little eye is still open. Verotchka's one little ear is asleep, the other little ear is still listening. Lulla-Lullaby.





THE STORY OF A BOLD RABBIT WITH COCK EYES AND A SHORT TAIL



HIS rabbit was born in the woods and was scared of everything. If a branch cracked anywhere or a bird flew past or a lump of snow





fell from a tree, his rabbit heart went down, down, down into his furry boots. Now this little rabbit was afraid for a day, for two days, for a week, for a whole year. But when he was grown up, he just got tired of being a scared rabbit.

“I am not afraid of anybody!” he shouted through the woods. “I am not afraid at all! I am not afraid of anything or of anybody, and that’s all there is to it!”

One day, the rabbits gathered to listen to him. The little ones ran, the old rabbits hobbled along to hear Long-Ear, Cock-Eye, Short-Tail’s boastings.

They listened and couldn’t believe their own ears, for there never had been anything like a rabbit, unafraid of anything or anybody before.

“Oh, you Cock-Eye,” called one, “do you mean to say you aren’t even afraid of a wolf?”





“Not even a wolf, nor a fox, nor a bear. I am afraid of no one,” said Cock-Eye.

Now this was altogether too amusing. The little rabbits giggled, covering their faces with their front paws. The kind old mother rabbits laughed and even the wise old rabbits, who had had a taste of the paws of the fox, and had felt the fangs of the wolf, smiled. So very funny was this rabbit that suddenly everyone was seized with merriment. They started jumping, tumbling, turning somersaults, and playing tag as if they had all suddenly gone mad.

“What is the use of talking so much,” finally shouted Cock-Eye, drunk with his own boldness. “I tell you if I were to meet a wolf, I’d eat him up myself.”

“My, what a funny rabbit!” said the crowd. “And what a foolish rabbit, too.” They all knew he was funny and foolish;





still they laughed at him and jested with him about the wolf. And as they were speaking of the wolf, the wolf stood right there listening, though they did not see him.

The wolf was walking through the forest on his own wolfish business. Then he grew hungry and began to think how fine it would be to have a bit of fresh rabbit. Suddenly quite near by, he heard rabbits talking, laughing and shouting his name. He stopped short, sniffed the air and crept nearer and nearer. When he was very near the merry-making rabbits, he learned that they were making sport of him, and that Cock-Eye, Long-Ear, Short-Tail was laughing at him more than anyone else.

"Eh, Brother! Just wait and I'll gobble you up," said the Gray Wolf to himself,





as he tried to spy out the boastful, bold rabbit.

Meanwhile, the rabbits, aware of nothing, made merry and merrier. Finally, the boaster climbed up on the stump of a tree, sat on his hind legs, and said,

“Hear, all ye cowards! Listen and look at me! Now I will show you some tricks. I I I”

The words were frozen on his lips, for just then he saw the wolf looking, looking straight at him. The other rabbits did not see the wolf, but Cock-Eye did and he didn't dare to breathe.

Then happened the most extraordinary thing. Through sheer fear, the Boaster jumped up like a rubber ball, fell on the wide forehead of the wolf, rolled over his back, turned a somersault in the air, landed on his feet, and ran as if he were trying to run out of his skin.





Long, long did the unfortunate rabbit run. It seemed to him the wolf was right behind him and that in another moment he would feel the wolf's fangs. The poor limp rabbit ran on until he had no strength left and finally he closed his eyes and fell under a bush, dead with weariness.

Meanwhile, the wolf was running in another direction. When the rabbit fell on his forehead, the wolf thought he had been hit by a gun shot and he ran away as fast as he could, saying to himself, "There are plenty of other rabbits in the forest. This one seems quite crazy anyway and not fit to eat."

Now for a long time the other rabbits did not realize what had happened. Some ran into the bushes, some hid behind stumps, others crawled into their holes. After a while they grew tired of hiding







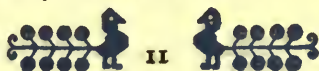
and little by little, they crept out and looked around.

Then said one, "Our rabbit certainly scared that wolf. If it had not been for him, few of us would have escaped alive. But where is he, our Fearless One?"

And everyone began looking for him. They looked everywhere, but Cock-Eye was nowhere to be found. They began to think the Gray Wolf had eaten him up, when they discovered him, lying in a hole under a bush, almost dead from fear.

"Good for you, Cock-Eye," shouted the rabbits all in one voice. "You certainly frightened that wolf very cleverly. We thought you were boasting all the time, when you were telling us you were not afraid of anything or anybody."

At once the bold rabbit came to life. He crept out of the hole, shook himself, squinted his eyes, and said:





“And what did you think, you cowards?”

And from that day, the bold rabbit was convinced that he was really not afraid of anyone.



THE STORY OF LITTLE CACINELLA

I



OW and where little Cacinella was born, no one knows. It happened one sunny day in spring. Little Cacinella looked around and said,





“Very nice.” She stretched her tiny wings, rubbed one little thin leg against the other, looked around again and said:

“How very, very nice! How warm the sun! How blue the sky! How green the grass! How very, very nice! and all this is mine!”

Rubbing one little leg against the other once more, little Cacinella began to fly. She flew and looked around and rejoiced. Beneath her, the grass was green, and hidden in its bosom, was a crimson flower.

“Little Cacinella, come to me,” called the flower.

Cacinella came down to the ground, climbed into the flower and sipped its sweet nectar.

“How kind you are, little flower,” said Cacinella, rubbing her mouth with one of her little thin legs.



“Yes, I may be kind, but I cannot walk,” complained the flower.

“Still, the world is lovely,” said little Cacinella, “and it is all mine, too.”

She had hardly finished, when a hairy drone flew down upon the flower with a loud buzz.

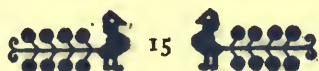
“Buzz! Buzz! Who dares to get into my flower? Buzz! Buzz! Who dares to sip my sweet nectar? Buzz! Buzz! Oh, you nasty little Cacinella, get away from here! Buzz! Buzz! Get away or I’ll sting you to death.”

“I say, what does this mean?” piped little Cacinella. “Everything is mine.”

“Buzz! Buzz! No, it’s mine.”

Little Cacinella was barely able to escape from the angry drone. She crept into the grass, licked her thin little legs, sticky with flower nectar, and said angrily:

“How rude that drone was! It’s quite





amazing! He even tried to sting me to death! Why, aren't they all mine, the sun and the grass and the flower!"

"No, pardon me. They are all mine," said a fuzzy Caterpillar, crawling along a blade of grass. Little Cacinella realized that a caterpillar cannot fly, so she grew bold.

"Pardon me, Mr. Caterpillar. You are mistaken. I do not interfere with your crawling. Don't argue with me."

"Very well. Pray don't touch my grass. To tell you the truth, I don't like it. So many of you fly about here. You are all such light-minded creatures; while I, Caterpillar, am a serious person. To be frank, everything is mine. I crawl along a blade of grass and I eat it up. I get into a flower and I eat that up. Good day."





II



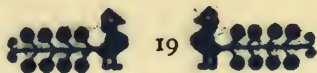
N a few hours, little Cacinella learned many things. She learned that besides the sun, the blue sky and the green grass, there are angry drones, serious caterpillars, thorns on flowers—all of which made one sad. Little Cacinella had thought that everything belonged to her and was especially created for her. Now it hurt her to discover that others thought that everything had been made especially for them. Something was wrong.

Little Cacinella flew further and she came to a pool.

“Now, this is surely mine,” she piped gaily. “My water. I am so happy. Here are also grass and flowers.”

Then she met other cacinellas.

“Hello, sister,” they called.





"Hello, dears. I'm so glad I met you. It was getting very lonely flying about alone. What are you doing here?"

"We are playing, sister. Come along with us. We are very happy. When were you born?"

"Just to-day. A drone almost stung me to death and I also met a caterpillar. I thought everything belonged to me. They said everything was theirs."

The little cacinellas calmed their guest and invited her to play with them. Then they swarmed in a thick cloud over the pool, playing tag, flying and squeaking.

Our little Cacinella was almost overcome with joy and completely forgot the angry drone and the serious caterpillar.

"Oh how nice," she gurgled with delight. "It's all mine—the sun, the grass, the water. I cannot understand why the others were so angry. It is all mine, but I





don't interfere with anybody's life. I let them fly and buzz and be happy. It doesn't bother me."

Little Cacinella played a while and then sat down for a rest among some reeds. Sitting there, little Cacinella watched the other cacinellas playing, when suddenly a sparrow flashed by, no one knew whence, and dropped like a stone among them.

"Oh! Oh!" cried the little cacinellas, scattering in all directions.

When the sparrow flew away, many little cacinellas were missing from the flock.

"The thief," scolded the older cacinellas. "He ate about fifteen or more of us."

"That's worse than the drone," thought little Cacinella, and growing frightened, she hid with the other cacinellas deeper among the reeds. But there too, they





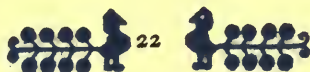
found enemies. Two of them were eaten by a small fish and two more by a frog.

“What’s all this?” wondered little Cacinella. “This is not a bit nice. It is almost impossible to live. They are perfectly horrid!”

It was a good thing that there were many little cacinellas. Those that disappeared were hardly missed; many new ones were always coming, flying about and squeaking, “It’s all ours! It’s all ours!”

“No, it’s not,” called our little Cacinella to them. “There are, besides us, angry drones, serious caterpillars, horrid sparrows, fishes and frogs. Take care, sisters! Take care!”

When night came, all the little cacinellas hid in the rushes. Stars sprinkled the sky. The moon rose and reflected everything in the water.





“My moon, my stars,” thought little Cacinella; but she did not dare to say it aloud. Some one might take them away from her.

III

SUMMER passed quickly for little Cacinella. There was so much to make her happy, but there were sad times, too. Twice she was almost swallowed by a swift marten. Once a frog crept up to her unawares and nearly gobbled her up. A little cacinella has many enemies, you know.

Our little Cacinella had her own joys. One day, she met another little Cacinella with long hairy moustache, who said:

“You are so pretty, little Cacinella. Let us be friends and live together.”

And they did. And they were very



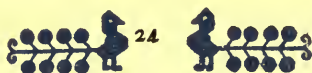


happy. They were always together; wherever one went, the other followed.

Summer passed before they were aware of it.

Rainy days came; nights grew cold. Our little Cacinella laid many eggs. She hid them in the thick grass, murmuring, "How tired I am."

No one saw how or when little Cacinella died. She may not have died at all. She may have only fallen asleep quietly for the winter, to wake up in the spring and be happy once more.





THE STORY OF MOSQUITO LONG-NOSE
AND FUZZY BEAR, MISHKA SHORT-TAIL

I



It happened at noon, when all the mosquitoes hid in the marsh to escape the heat.

Mr. Long-Nose settled under a leaf and fell asleep. His sleep was disturbed by a despairing shout.



“Wow! Wow! Help! Help!”

Mosquito Long-Nose jumped out from under the leaf and called:

“What happened? Why are you screaming?”

A whole swarm of mosquitoes flew about, buzzed and shrieked—apparently for no reason at all.

“Oh, my! Just think what happened! A bear came into our marsh, stretched himself out full length and fell asleep. And as he lay down, he crushed five hundred of us; and as he opened his mouth, he swallowed a hundred of us. Some trouble, brothers. We hardly escaped being crushed to death ourselves.”

Mosquito Long-Nose grew furiously angry—angry at the bear and at the foolish mosquitoes, who were shouting to no purpose.

“Stop your squealing!” shouted he.





"It's all very simple. I will go and chase the bear away. Your noise is foolish."

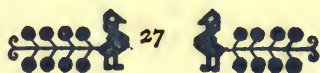
Mosquito Long-Nose grew even more angry and flew away. He reached the marsh and there lay the bear in the very thickets where the mosquitoes had lived from the beginning of time.

The Bear lay stretched full length, snoring and whistling like a trumpeter.

"The beast! Grabbed the place that doesn't belong to him . . . killed off so many mosquitoes . . . and now he sleeps so soundly! It's outrageous!"

"Hey, Uncle, what are you doing?" shouted Mosquito Long-Nose through the forest. He shouted so loudly that he grew afraid of himself. Fuzzy Mishka opened one eye and saw nothing. Then he opened the other eye and all he could see was a mosquito hovering over his nose.

"What do you want, Comrade?" grum-





bled Mishka, getting angry, and justly so. There he was all ready for a nap when along comes this good-for-nothing squealing at him and waking him up.

“Hey, Uncle, get away! Get up and go away in a friendly fashion!” advised Long-Nose.

Mishka opened his eyes, looked at Mr. Impudence, snorted and grew furiously angry.


“What do you want, you good-for-nothing?” growled Mishka.

“Leave our quarters or I’ll eat you up, fur coat and all.”

The bear was very much amused. He turned over on the other side, covered his face with his paw and fell asleep, snoring immediately.



II

 MOSQUITO LONG-NOSE returned to the flock, shouting across the entire marsh, "I certainly did frighten him! He will never come again."

The mosquitoes wondered. They were perplexed and asked, "But what about Mishka? Where is he now?"

"I don't know, brothers. He surely got scared when I told him I'd eat him up, if he did not go away. You know I don't like to jest, so I just said, 'I'll eat you up,' I'm afraid he perished from fear while I was coming back here. Well, it's his own fault."

The mosquitoes buzzed loudly. They were discussing how to deal with an invading bear. There never had been such a noise in the marsh before. They buzzed



and hissed and finally decided to chase the bear away from their domain.

“Let him go home into his forest and sleep there. The marsh is ours. Our fathers and our grandfathers lived in this very marsh. It is ours.”

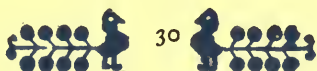
One sensible old mosquito advised them to leave the bear alone. “Let him have his sleep,” said she, “when he wakes up, he will leave the marsh of his own accord.”

But the rest of the flock just flew at her. The poor old thing was glad to get away and hide.

“Come on, brothers!” shouted Mosquito Long-Nose, louder than the rest. “We will show him who we are!”

The whole flock followed Mosquito Long-Nose. They came to the spot where Mishka was lying as still as death.

“Didn’t I say he died of fright?”







boasted Mosquito Long-Nose. "It's a pity! He was a fine, strong bear!"

"Brothers, he is only asleep," piped a tiny mosquito, flying close to Mishka's nose and being almost blown to pieces by the wind from the bear's nostrils.

"The shameless rascal!" squealed the Mosquitoes in chorus. "He crushed five hundred of us . . . swallowed another hundred . . . and now he sleeps as if nothing had happened."

But shaggy Mishka slept soundly as if nothing had really happened. He was whistling through his nose.

"He is pretending to be asleep," said Mosquito Long-Nose. "I'll show him who I am. Hey, Uncle, enough of this make-believe!"

And with this, Mosquito Long-Nose flew at the bear, aimed at his black nose and pierced it with his mosquito-sting.





Mishka fairly jumped, grabbing his nose with his paw; but Mosquito Long-Nose was already too far away.

“Well, Uncle, you did not seem to like that,” squealed Mosquito Long-Nose. “Go away or it will be the worse for you. I’m not alone. With me, is Grandfather, Mosquito Longer-Nose, and my younger brother, Mosquito Longest-Nose. Better go away, Uncle.”

“I will not go away!” shouted the bear, sitting down on his haunches. “I’ll crush you all to death!”

“Oh, uncle, you’re boasting foolishly.”

Once more, Mosquito Long-Nose flew at the bear and this time he aimed at his eye. Mishka groaned with pain, and slapped his paw over his face, trying to catch the mosquito. Again he failed and he only scratched his face in the effort. Mosquito Long-Nose was meanwhile



buzzing by close to his ear and threatening Mishka, "I'll eat you up, Uncle."

III



ISHKA grew angry and angrier. He grabbed a birch tree and tore it up by the roots, aiming it at the mosquitoes.

He waved it and waved it until he grew very tired, but he did not succeed in killing a single mosquito. They just swarmed and buzzed a little beyond his reach. Then Mishka took a huge stone and hurled it at the Mosquitoes, but all in vain.

"Well, Uncle," squealed Mosquito Long-Nose, "I'll eat you up after all."

The battle raged between Mishka and the mosquitoes. There was much noise; one could hear the bear's growling from afar.



IV



He tore up many trees, he dug up many stones. He always aimed at Mosquito Long-Nose, who seemed to be right over his ear. But the bear's paw always missed its aim, while his face was scratched and bleeding from his own claws.

Finally, Mishka was overpowered. He sat on his haunches and snorted and thought of a new trick, which was to roll in the grass and crush the whole mosquito kingdom. Mishka rolled and rolled but nothing happened. He only grew more tired. Then he hid his face in the moss, but that was even worse because the mosquitoes clung to his bear tail. Mishka became furious.

"Just wait, I'll show you!" he howled so loudly that he could be heard for miles



around. "I'll show you some trick! Aiy! Aiy! Aiy!"

The mosquitoes flew aside and waited to see what would happen. Now Mishka climbed a tree like an acrobat, sat on the thickest bough and roared:

"You just dare to come near to me and all your noses will be broken!"

The mosquitoes laughed in their shrill voices and flew at the bear, full force, squealing, swarming and attacking him. Mishka beat them off again and again. Without intending, he swallowed a hundred of them, choking. He coughed and the bough broke under the strain. Down fell Mishka. But he was up again, patting his bruised sides and saying:

"Who is the winner? You see how skillful I am at jumping from trees."

The mosquitoes laughed in their thin, shrill laughter. And Mosquito Long-





Nose just trumpeted, "I'll eat you up! I'll eat you up! I'll eat you up!"

Completely exhausted, Mishka knew that he was beaten, but he was ashamed to leave the marsh. He sat on his haunches, but all he could do was to blink his eyes.

He was saved from further shame by a Wise Frog. She came hopping along from under a bush and seeing Mishka in such difficulty, she said:

"Why do you bother yourself needlessly, Master Mishka? Don't waste your time with these nasty little mosquitoes. They aren't worth it."

"They really are not," cried the bear joyfully. "I was only fooling a bit. Just let them visit my lair, then I'll . . . I'll . . . I'll . . ."

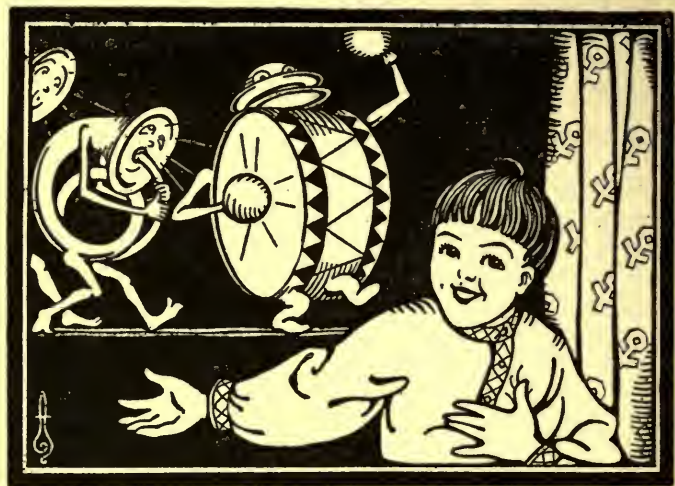
In a flash, Mishka turned and ran from the marsh. But Mosquito Long-Nose flew right after, shouting:





“Catch him, brothers! Catch him!
Hold him!”

The mosquitoes gathered in meeting
and decided, “It isn’t worth while. Let
him go. The marsh is left. It did not
go away.”



VANKA'S BIRTHDAY

I



EAT, drum! Rub-a-dub-dub!
Blow, trumpets! Toot-a-
toot-too!

This is Vanka's birthday.
Let's have music. All are



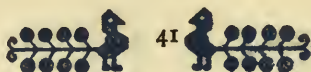
welcome. Come, let us gather. Rub-a-dub-dub! Toot-a-toot-too! Vanka is strutting about in his new red blouse, exclaiming:

“Brothers, you are welcome. There is plenty to eat. The soup is made of the freshest shavings; the cutlets of the very best and cleanest sand; doughnuts of different-colored papers; tea of the finest boiling water. You are all welcome. Music, play! Rub-a-dub-dub! Rub-a-dub-dub! Toot-a-toot-too!”

The room was crowded with visitors. The first to arrive was the bulging Wooden Top.

“Z-z-z! Z-z-z! Where is the birthday child? Z-z-z! Z-z-z! I am very fond of making merry in good company.”

The next to arrive were two Dolls; one, blue-eyed Anya with a slightly damaged nose; the other, black-eyed Katya with





one arm missing. Both came in very modestly and sat down on the toy couch.

"Let us see the treat Vanka has for us," said Anya, "I think he boasts too much. The music isn't bad, but I have my doubts about the treat."

"Anya, you are always grumbling," said Katya, chidingly.

"And you are always ready to argue," said Anya.

The Dollies had a little argument and were just about to quarrel, when a much worn Clown hobbled in on one leg, and made peace.

"Ladies, patience! Everything will be very nice and we will have a good time. Of course, I have only one leg, but Top isn't any better off than I am. See him spin on his one leg. Hello, old Top!"

"Z-z-z! Z-z-z! Hello! Why does one





of your eyes look as if someone had punched you?"

"Nonsense! I fell off the couch. Worse things than that happen."

"Oh, I know that. Spinning, I sometimes strike my head against the wall full force."

"It's a good thing your head is empty," said Clown.

"All the same, it hurts. Z-z-z! Just try it and-you'll find out."

Clown only clapped his brass cymbals in answer. He was really a very light-minded fellow.

Then came Petrooshka, bringing along with him a crowd of visitors: his own wife, Matryona Ivanovna; the German doctor, Carl Ivanovitch; and a huge-nosed Gypsy, riding on a three-legged horse.

"Now, Vanka, receive your visitors!" said Petrooshka gaily, tapping his own



nose. "They're all fine. Look at my own wife, Matryona Ivanovna! Isn't she splendid? She is as fond of tea as a duck is of water."

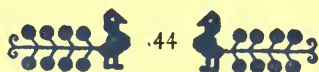
"We will find some tea for her, Master Petrooshka, and we are always glad to see good company," said Vanka. "Please sit down, Matryona Ivanovna. Carl Ivanovitch, pray be seated."

Then came Mr. Bear with Mr. Rabbit, Gray Billy Goat and Waddling Duckling, Mr. Rooster and Mr. Wolf. There was plenty of room for everyone.

The last to arrive was Verotchka's Slipper with Verotchka's Broom. They looked around and found all seats occupied.

"Never mind. I'll stand in the corner," said Broom.

Slipper said nothing, but crept silently under the couch. She was a venerable old






Slipper, very much worn. She was slightly embarrassed by the tiny hole near her toe, but she hoped that under the couch no one would notice that.

“Music, start!” ordered Vanka. “Drum, beat! Rub-a-dub-dub! Trumpets toot! Toot-a-toot-too!”

Immediately the guests became merry and gay.

II



T the beginning, the party was splendid. Drum did his own beating, and Trumpet his own tooting. Top buzzed, Clown beat his cymbals and Petrooshka squealed with all his might. It was merry and gay.

“Friends, be happy!” called Vanka, smoothing his flaxen curls.

Anya and Katya laughed in their shrill



voices, clumsy Bear danced with little Broom, Gray Billy Goat strutted about with Waddling Duck, Clown tumbled about, showing off his tricks, and Dr. Carl Ivanovitch, chatting with Matryona Ivanovna, asked:

“Does your stomach ache, Matryona Ivanovna?”

“Why, no, Carl Ivanovitch,” replied Matryona Ivanovna, offended. “What makes you think that?”

“Just show me your tongue,” insisted the Doctor.

“Leave me alone, please.”

“I’m here,” rang the thin voice of Silver Spoon, with which Verotchka ate her cereal. She had been lying quietly on the table until the Doctor spoke of showing a tongue. Then she jumped up, for she knew that the Doctor always needed her





help when he looked at Verotchka's tongue.

"Oh, no! Not that!" piped Matryona Ivanovna, waving her arms comically, as if she were a windmill.

"Very well. I will not burden you with my services," said little Spoon, very much offended. She was growing angry, when little Top came spinning up to her and invited her to dance. Top hummed. Little Spoon rang.

Little Slipper could resist no longer. She crept out from under the couch and whispered to little Broom:

"I love you very much, little Broom."

Little Broom closed her eyes softly and sighed: she loved to be loved. She was such a modest little Broom, never boasting as others do,—for instance, Matryona Ivanovna, Anya, and Katya. These doll-





ies always liked to make fun of other people's failings, saying:

"Clown has but one leg. Petrooshka's nose is too long. Carl Ivanovitch is bald. Gypsy is like a firebrand."

But Vanka, the birthday child, was criticized most of all.

"He is too much of a moujik," Katya said.

"And he boasts too much," added Anya.

After dancing and making merry, they all sat down at the table and the real feast began. The dinner passed as a real birthday dinner should; not without a few mishaps, however. Bear almost ate Rabbit, mistaking him for the cutlet. Top nearly came to blows with Gypsy about little Spoon. You see, Gypsy wanted to steal little Spoon and he tried to put her into his pocket. Petrooshka, a well-known



squabbler, quarrelled with his wife over nothing at all.

“Matryona Ivanovna, be calm,” urged Carl Ivanovitch.

“Petrooshka is really kind. Perhaps your head aches. I have wonderful powders for headaches.”

“Doctor, do leave her alone,” said Petrooshka. “She is an impossible woman. I love her very much. Come Matryona Ivanovna, let us kiss and be friends.”

“Hurrah!” shouted Vanka. “That’s much better than quarreling. I hate to see people quarrel. Just look . . .”

Then something quite unexpected happened, something so horrible, it’s dreadful to relate.

Drum beat—rub-a-dub-dub! Trumpets blew—toot-a-toot-too. Clown clanged his cymbals. Little Spoon laughed in her silver voice. Top hummed. Rabbit shouted





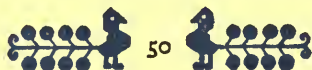
merrily, "Bo! Bo ! Bo!" Porcelain Dog barked loudly. Rubber Cat meowed gently. Bear stamped his feet with such force that the floor shook. Gayest of all was Gray Billy Goat. He was the best dancer. And he shook his beard so comically and bleated "Baa! Baa! Baa!" in his cracked voice.

III



OW did it all happen? That is hard to tell because of all the guests only Verotchka's Slipper remembered just what had transpired. She was the only sensible one. She crept away under the couch just in time.

This is how it all happened.. First the Wooden Blocks went up to Vanka to congratulate him. No—No—NO. That isn't how it started. The Blocks really did





go up to Vanka, but the real cause of the trouble was Katya. Yes, it was all her fault. This pretty little rascal, towards the very end of the dinner, whispered to Anya:

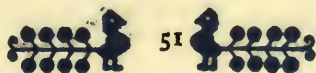
“Anya, who do you think is the prettiest of all here?”

It was quite a simple question to ask, but Matryona Ivanovna, overhearing it, grew frightfully offended and asked Katya:

“Do you think my Petrooshka is ugly?”

“Nobody thinks that,” answered Katya, trying to defend herself. But it was too late.

“Of course, his nose is too big,” continued Matryona Ivanovna, “but that is hardly noticeable, if you look at him sideways. I know he has a bad habit of squealing and squabbling with people but he is really very kind. And as for brains . . .”





She was unable to finish because the Dolls began to argue with so much heat that they attracted everybody's attention. The first to interfere was, of course, Petrooshka himself.

"It's true, Matryona Ivanovna," said he, "I am the handsomest here."

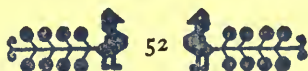
Then the men were all offended.

"Just listen to this conceited Petrooshka!" said they. "It's disgusting!"

Clown was not much of a talker, so he was silently offended. But Dr. Carl Ivanovitch almost shouted:

"Does that mean that the rest of us are monsters? Gentlemen, I congratulate you!"

There was great noise and confusion. Gypsy shouted something in his own language. Bear growled. Wolf howled. Gray Billy Goat bawled. Top hummed. They all shouted their offense.





“Gentlemen, stop!” pleaded Vanka. “Please pay no attention to Petrooshka. I am sure he was only jesting.”

It was all in vain. Carl Ivanovitch was noisier and more excited than the rest. He even pounded his fist on the table and shouted:

“Gentlemen, this is a fine treat, I must say! We were invited here only to be told that we are monsters!”

“Ladies and gentlemen!” shouted Vanka, trying in vain to be heard. “If monsters are under discussion, there is but one monster here. It is I! Now are you satisfied?”

Then, let us see what happened next. . . .

Carl Ivanovitch completely lost control and flew at Petrooshka, with a threatening fist.

“If I were not an educated man, know-





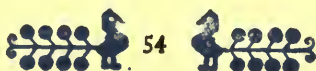
ing how to behave properly in decent society, I would say to you, 'Master Petrooshka, you are quite a fool.' "

Knowing Petrooshka's squabbling disposition, Vanka tried to get between him and the Doctor, but on his way, his fist caught Petrooshka's long nose. Petrooshka thought that it was not Vanka, but the doctor who had struck him. And that's how it all began.

Petrooshka clutched at the doctor. Gypsy, seated at one side, began without any provocation to pummel Clown. Bear threw himself with a growl upon Wolf. Top hit Billy Goat with his empty head. In a word, there was a row. Dolls squealed in their shrill voices and all three fainted with fright.

"I'm fainting," screamed Matryona Ivanovna, falling off the couch.

"Gentlemen! What does all this¹







mean?" pleaded Vanka. "Gentlemen! Is this not my birthday? Gentlemen! This is rude!"

It was a real fight. The confusion was so great that it was impossible to tell who was beating whom. Vanka tried to separate the fighters, but it ended in his beating anybody and everybody who came within his arm's reach. And as he was the strongest, his guests came off pretty badly.

"Help! Help! Heavens' help!" cried Petrooshka, loudest of all, trying to strike the Doctor.

"They are murdering Petrooshka! Help! Help!"

Slipper was the only one who escaped the fight. She crept under the couch just in time. She closed her eyes in fear. Rabbit, seeking safety, hid inside Slipper.

"Where are you going?" grumbled Slipper.





“Keep still! They might hear us and then both of us would get it,” pleaded little Rabbit, peeping through the tiny hole in Slipper’s toe. “What a rascal that Petrooshka is! He beats everyone and shouts loudest of all. He’s a fine guest, I must say! You know I hardly got away from Wolf. My! it’s horror, just to think of it! Just see Duckling with her tiny legs up. Poor thing! She must be dead.”

“How foolish you are, little Rabbit,” said Slipper. “All the dolls have fainted and so has Duckling.”

They fought and fought and fought until Vanka drove away all the guests except the Dolls.

Matryona Ivanovna, tired of lying in a faint, opened one eye and asked:

“Where am I? Doctor, will you see if I am still alive?”

No one answered her and Matryona





Ivanovna opened her other eye. The room was empty except for Vanka, who stood in the center looking around, much astonished. Anya and Katya also revived and they, too, were amazed. Something horrible must have happened.

"You're a fine birthday child, I must say!" simultaneously exclaimed the Dolls, addressing Vanka, who did not know what to answer.

Someone hit him; he hit someone. Why? Wherefore? He did not know.

"I really do not know how it all happened," said Vanka. "The thing that hurts most is that I love them all. All without exception."

"We know how it all happened," called Slipper and Rabbit from under the couch. "We saw it all."

"It is all your fault," said Matryona Ivanovna, accusing little Slipper and



Rabbit. "Of course, it is you who are to blame. You started the row and then you ran away and hid."

"They're to blame! They're to blame!" screamed Anya and Katya in chorus.

"Now I see it all," cried Vanka, joyfully. "Get out, you rascals! You only visit people to start quarrels."

Slipper and Rabbit were barely able to make their escape through the window.

"I'll teach you a lesson," threatened Matryona Ivanovna, following in their wake. "There are some nasty people in this world! Even little Duckling will agree with me."

"Yes, yes," said little Duckling. "I saw them hide under the couch." Duckling always agreed with everybody.

"Let the guests return," said Katya. "We can still have a jolly time."

The guests were all glad to come back.





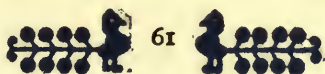
Some had black eyes; some limped. Petrooshka's long nose had the worst of it.

"The rascals!" all repeated in chorus, blaming Rabbit and Slipper for everything. "Who would have thought it of them!"

"Oh, I am so tired! My hands are all sore," complained Vanka. "But let us forget it and bear no grudge. Let's have music."

Once more, drum beat—rub-a-dub-dub! Trumpets blew—toot-a-toot-too! And Petrooshka shouted with all his might:

"Hurrah for Vanka!"





THE STORY OF MASTER SPARROW,
MASTER STICKELBACK AND THE
JOLLY CHIMNEY-SWEEP, YASHA

I



MASTER SPARROW and Master Stickelback were great friends. In summer, Master Sparrow came daily to the river, calling:



“Hello, brother! How are you?”

“Pretty well. Managing to keep alive,” answered Stickelback. “Come to visit me. The deep pools are fine. The water is quiet. And it’s just full of water grass. I will treat you to frogs’ eggs, worms and water bugs.”

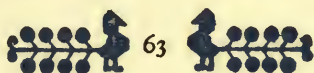
“Thank you, brother, I would come with pleasure, only I am afraid of the water,” said the Sparrow. “You better visit me on my roof. I’ll treat you to berries—I have a whole garden full—and we will rummage for some bread crusts, some oats, a bit of sugar and live mosquitoes. You like sugar, don’t you?”

“What does it look like?” asked Stickelback.

“It is white.”

“Like the pebbles in my river?”

“Exactly. But when you take it into your mouth it’s sweet. One can’t eat





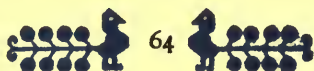
pebbles, you know. Come, let us fly to my roof."

"No, I can't fly. And I suffocate in the open air," said the Fish. "Let us have a swim together in my river. That's much better. I will show you all sorts of things."

Master Sparrow tried to get into the water. He jumped in up to his knees; then fear seized him—fear of drowning. Heretofore, all that the Sparrow had ever done was to get a drink of clear river water and to take a bath in the shallowest part on a hot day. Then he would shake his feathers out and return to his roof.

Nevertheless, the two were great friends. They liked chatting together about all sorts of things.

"Don't you ever get tired of staying in the water," Sparrow would say, wonder-





ing. "It is so wet. Aren't you afraid of taking cold?"

Master Stickelback in his turn would wonder at Master Sparrow:

"Don't you ever get tired of flying? Isn't it too warm to be out in the sun? It would just suffocate me. It is always cool where I live. I swim as I like. When summer comes, my river is crowded with bathers. But who ever visits your roof?"

"Oh, I have plenty of visitors. I have one great chum, the Chimney-Sweep, Yasha. He often visits me. He is such a jolly Chimney-Sweep, always singing. He cleans the chimneys, singing away. When he rests, he sits on the very edge of the roof, eats his piece of bread for lunch, while I pick up the crumbs. We are great friends. I also like to be jolly sometimes."

The Sparrow and the Fish had many troubles in common. Winter was very





hard on both. Poor Master Sparrow almost froze to death. The days were so bitter cold. His very soul seemed to freeze within him. He would puff himself up, tuck his legs underneath him and sit on his roof, waiting for the sunshine. There was only one other warm place for him and that was the chimney, but even here it was hardly safe.

Once, Master Sparrow almost perished. It was the fault of his best friend, the Chimney-Sweep. One day, Yasha came to clean the chimney. His brush, with the weight attached, came down the chimney and almost smashed Master Sparrow's head. Covered with soot, Master Sparrow escaped from the chimney. He was even blacker than Yasha.

"I say! What do you mean, Yasha? You almost killed me," scolded Master Sparrow.





“How was I to know you were sitting in the chimney?” asked Yasha.

“You must be more careful,” said Master Sparrow. “It isn’t very nice to be hit by such a heavy weight. I am sure you wouldn’t like it.”

In winter, Stickelback’s life was not very pleasant. He crawled somewhere deep, deep into the river and dozed there for days. It was dark and cold and he had no desire to move. Occasionally he came up to the ice-hole to chat with his friend.

When Master Sparrow came to the ice-hole for a drink, he would call, “Hey, Master Stickelback! Are you still alive?”

“I am,” Master Stickelback would answer sleepily. “But I want to stay asleep all the time. It isn’t very nice here. Everybody is asleep.”

“It isn’t much better where I live,” said Sparrow. “But we must be patient. At





times the wind is very cruel. There is no sleep then. I hop along on one leg to keep warm, while people watching me say, 'What a gay little sparrow!' If only warm days would come! Brother, I believe you are asleep again."

Summer brought with it its own troubles. Once a hawk chased Master Sparrow for two miles. Sparrow barely escaped by hiding in the sedge near the river.

"My! I am glad to get off alive," complained Master Sparrow to Master Stickelback, scarcely able to catch his breath. "That rascal almost caught me then."

"He must be something like our pike," said Stickelback, consolingly. "Not long ago I, too, barely escaped the pike's fangs. That pike was as quick as lightning. One day, as I was swimming out with some friends, I mistook him for a log, he lay so





still, and he chased me. Will you tell me why there are pikes in the world? I have often wondered, but I cannot understand."

"Neither can I," said Master Sparrow. "Do you know, I sometimes think that a hawk must at one time have been a pike and a pike must have been a hawk. Anyway, both are rascals."

II



THUS lived Master Sparrow and Master Stickelback, freezing in winter, joyous in summer; while jolly Chimney-Sweep, Yasha, cleaned his chimneys and sang his songs. Each had his work, his joys and his troubles.

One summer day the Chimney-Sweep walked down to the river to wash. He walked along, whistling, when suddenly



he heard a terrific noise. What had happened?

Whirling above the river was a crowd of birds, ducks, geese, swallows, snipe, crows and pigeons, shouting with laughter, for no apparent reason.

"I say! What has happened?" asked the Chimney-Sweep.

"This is what happened," piped a bold Bluebird. "It is too funny for words. Just see what Master Sparrow is doing. He seems quite mad."

The Bluebird piped in her thin, high voice, flicked her tail and soared above the river. When Chimney-Sweep drew nearer, Master Sparrow just flew at him. He was frightful to behold. His beak was open, his eyes wild, his feathers all ruffled.

"Master Sparrow, what is all this





about? Why are you making all this noise?" asked the Chimney-Sweep.

"No! I'll teach him a few things!" shouted Master Sparrow, fairly choking with rage. "He doesn't yet know who I am! I'll teach that confounded Stickelback! He'll have cause to remember me! The rascal!"

"Don't listen to him," shouted Stickelback from his river. "It's all lies."

"Who is lying?" shouted Master Sparrow. "Who found the worm? I'm lying? Indeed! A nice fat worm that I myself dug up on the bank. I worked hard, too. I finally got him and was just about ready to take him home to my nest—I have a family, you know, that has to be fed. No sooner did I get above the river, the worm in my mouth, than that abominable Stickelback (I hope the pike swallows him) shouted, 'Hawk! Hawk!' I



screamed with fright and the worm dropped out of my mouth into the water and Master Stickelback swallowed him. I call this cheating. There was no hawk in sight."

"It was only a little joke of mine," said Stickelback, defending himself. "That worm was really delicious."

All kinds of fish were gathered about Stickelback, minnows, carp and perch, listening and laughing at the story.

"Yes, that was a fine trick Master Stickelback played on his old friend. But funnier still was to see Master Sparrow fighting Master Stickelback, flying at him again and again and getting nothing."

"I hope my worm chokes you! I'll dig up another," shouted Master Sparrow. "What hurts me most is that Stickelback fooled me and now he laughs at me. I was even inviting him to visit me on my roof."





A fine friend he is, I must say! Here's our Chimney-Sweep, Yasha. He will agree with me, I'm sure. He's my good friend. At times, we even eat together. Yasha eats his bread and I pick up the crumbs."

"Wait, brothers! This affair needs a judge," announced Yasha. "Just let me wash myself and I shall deal with the whole thing fairly. And you, Master Sparrow, just calm yourself a bit."

"I know I am right. I have nothing to worry about," shouted Master Sparrow. "I only want to show Stickelback that I shall not stand for his jokes."

Chimney-Sweep Yasha sat down on the bank, put his lunch near him, washed his face and hands, and said:

"Now, brothers, let us get at the bottom of this trouble. You, Master Stickelback,



are a fish. And you, Master Sparrow, are a bird. Am I right?"

"Yes, yes," shouted the birds and fishes in chorus.

"Let us go on," said Yasha. "A fish must live in water, a bird in the air. Am I right? Well then, a worm lives in the ground. Very well. Now let's see."

The Chimney-Sweep opened his lunch, a piece of wheaten bread, and laid it on a stone, saying:

"Now look! What is this? Bread, isn't it? I earned it and I shall eat it. And with it, I shall have a drink of water. All this means that I have earned my dinner without harming anyone. A fish and a bird also want their dinner. Each of you has his own food. Why quarrel? Master Sparrow dug up the worm, therefore the worm was his. He earned it."

"Wait, Uncle," piped a thin voice in





the crowd. The birds moved apart to allow a little snipe to come forward. Standing on his thin little legs close to the Chimney-Sweep, the snipe said:

“It isn’t true, Uncle.”

“What isn’t true?” asked Yasha.

“About the worm,” said the snipe. “I found it. You can ask the ducks. They saw me. I found the worm and Master Sparrow snatched it away from me.”

Chimney-Sweep Yasha was puzzled. This was quite a different story.

“Let me see,” he murmured, trying to gather his thoughts together. “Hey, Master Sparrow! What do you mean by lying to me?”

“I’m not lying. The snipe is. He and the ducks made that story up.”

“Well, brothers, something is wrong. Of course, a worm isn’t anything, but to





steal it, is not nice. And he who steals must lie. Am I not right?"

"Right! You are right!" shouted all in chorus. "All the same, you have to be the judge between Master Stickelback and Master Sparrow."

"Which of those two is right?" asked Yasha. "Both made a noise. Both fought and stirred up everybody else. Who is right? Oh, the two of you, Master Stickelback and Master Sparrow, the two of you are rascals. I will punish both of you as an example. Now, both of you make up quickly."

"That's right," shouted the crowd in chorus. "Let them make up."

"As for the snipe who worked to get the worm, I will feed him with my crust," decided the Chimney-Sweep. "Then everybody will be satisfied."

"Splendid!" all shouted their approval.





The Chimney-Sweep made a move to offer his crust to the snipe, but the crust had disappeared. While Yasha was talking, Master Sparrow grabbed the crust and flew away with it.

“The rascal! The scamp!” shouted the birds and the fishes indignantly, starting in pursuit of the thief.

The crust was heavy and Master Sparrow could not fly far with it. He was caught just beyond the river. Birds, large and small, threw themselves upon the thief. It was a real battle. They were all tearing the bread to bits and the crumbs fell into the river. These the fishes grabbed. Then followed a battle between birds and fish. The crust was broken into tiny crumbs. The crumbs were eaten up. When it was all over, everybody grew thoughtful. They felt ashamed. While



chasing the thief to recover the crust, they had grabbed it up themselves.

The jolly Chimney-Sweep, Yasha, sat on the bank, watching and laughing. The whole affair had turned out to be so funny. They were all gone. There remained only the Sandy Snipe.

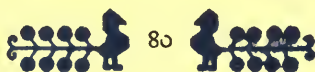
"Why don't you fly along with the others?" asked the Chimney-Sweep.

"I would, Uncle, only I am too small. The big birds might peck me to death."

"Well, maybe you are right, little Snipe. Both of us are left without our dinner. Evidently, we haven't worked hard enough for it."

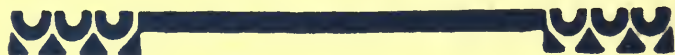
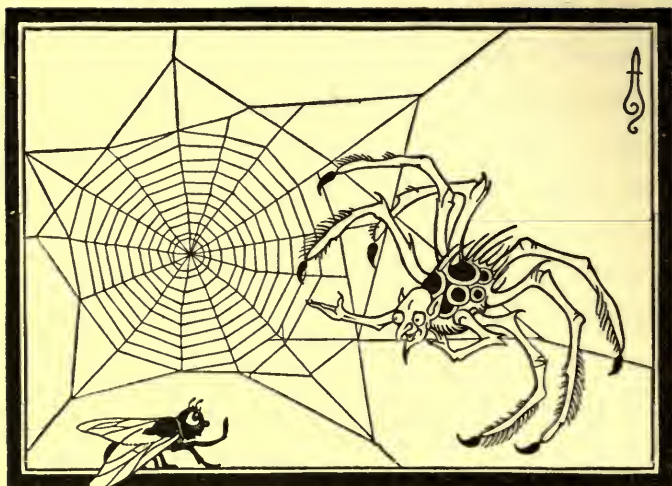
Then came Verotchka to the river bank and asked the jolly Chimney-Sweep what had happened. How she laughed when she heard the story!

"How foolish they all are, the fish and the birds," said Verotchka. "I could





divide everything right, and no one would quarrel. Not long ago I divided four apples. Father brought four apples and said, 'Divide these between you and Lisa and me evenly.' I divided them into three parts. I gave one apple to father, one apple to Lisa, and I took two apples for myself."



THE STORY OF THE LAST FLY

I



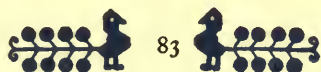
UMMER-TIME is a merry time for flies. It is hard to tell just how it all happened. There were so many flies; thousands of them, gaily flying and buzzing.

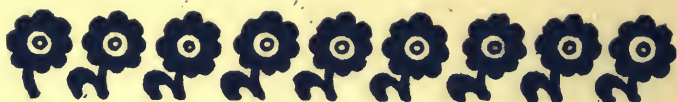


When Little Fly was born, she straightened out her wings and immediately felt happy,—so happy that one really cannot tell it in words. It was all so interesting. The doors and windows leading to the porch were thrown wide open in the morning, and Little Fly flitted in and out as she pleased.

“How kind human beings are!” exclaimed Little Fly, astonished, flying in and out of the windows. “The windows were made for us, and they are open for us. It is so nice to be alive and feeling so happy.”

She flew in and out of the garden many times. Sitting on a blade of grass, she admired the blooming lilacs, the delicate leaves of the budding poplars, and the different flowers in their beds. The gardener, still unknown to her, had taken care of everything. What a kind gardener! Lit-





tle Fly was not born yet and he had already prepared everything she might need. It was all the more amazing since he himself was not only unable to fly, but he even walked about with great difficulty, trembling all over at times, and muttering to himself.

"I wonder where these nasty flies come from?" grumbled the kind gardener.

The poor dear probably said this from sheer envy because all he could do was to dig beds, set out and water flowers. He couldn't fly. Little Fly liked to buzz around the gardener's red nose, which annoyed him very much.

People were usually very kind, providing all kinds of pleasures for flies. For instance, when Verotchka had her bread and milk in the morning, she always asked Aunt Olga for a piece of sugar. This she did just to give Little Fly a chance to have





a bit of sugar, a few crumbs of bread, and a few drops of milk.

“Now tell me, is there anything more delicious than this treat after working busily all morning?” said Little Fly.

Cook Páscha was even kinder than Verotchka. Every morning she would go to market and bring such wonderful things, especially for the flies—meat, fish, cream and butter. Pascha was the kindest woman in the whole house. Though, like the gardener, she could not fly, she knew perfectly well every need of a fly. She was the kindest woman in all the world.

And Aunt Olga—oh, that wonderful woman!—seemed to live only for the flies. With her own hands she would open all the windows every morning, so that the flies might come and go at will. When it rained, or it was cold, she closed the windows to keep their little wings dry and pre-



vent them from catching cold. Then Aunt Olga noticed that flies liked sugar and berries. So every day she cooked berries and sugar. The flies knew at once why she did this, and to show their gratitude, they crawled right into the pans of jam.

Verotchka was also very fond of jam, but Aunt Olga would only give her one or two teaspoonfuls, because she did not wish to deprive the flies of their share. As the flies could not eat all the jam at once, Aunt Olga put away the jam in jars (to keep it away from mice who were not entitled to jam) ready to serve to the flies each day at tea time.

“Oh, how kind and good everybody is!” exclaimed Little Fly, flitting in and out of the window. “It is even good that people cannot fly, for they would turn into big,



greedy flies, grabbing up everything. It's fine to live in this world!"

"But people aren't at all as kind as you think," remarked an old fly who liked to grumble occasionally. "It only seems so to you. Have you ever noticed the man they call Papa?"

"Oh, yes. He is a very strange gentleman. You are perfectly right, good old fly. Why does he smoke that pipe? He knows very well I do not like tobacco smoke. It seems to me sometimes that he does it just to spite me. And he doesn't like to do anything for flies. You know, once I tasted that ink with which he is forever writing, and I almost died. It was awful. I once saw with my own eyes two pretty, inexperienced young flies drown in his ink. It was a dreadful sight to see how he pulled them out with his pen, put them on his paper, making a splendid blot.



Just think of it! Then he blames us and not himself. Where is justice?"

"I think this Papa has no sense of justice, although he has one good quality," answered the old, experienced fly. "He drinks beer after dinner. That isn't at all a bad habit. To tell the truth, I like a taste of beer myself, though it does make me dizzy."

"I also like beer," confessed Little Fly, blushing slightly. "I become quite gay after having some, although my head aches the next day. Perhaps Papa does not do anything for flies because he does not care for jam and puts all of his sugar into his tea. One really cannot expect much of a man who does not eat jam. There is nothing left for him but his pipe."

The flies knew people very well, although they interpreted them in their own fashion.



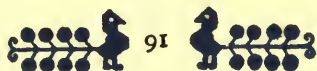


II



HE summer was hot. Each day brought more and more flies. They fell into the milk, crawled into the soup and into the ink-well, they buzzed and they whirled and annoyed everyone. Our Little Fly grew up into a big fly. On several occasions she almost perished. The first time her legs stuck in jam and she was just able to free herself. The second time she flew sleepily against a burning lamp and almost scorched her wings. The third time she was almost crushed by a closing window. On the whole, she had many adventures.

“There is no living with these flies about,” complained Cook. “They act like mad—crawling into everything. They must be done away with.”





Even our Fly decided that there were altogether too many flies, especially in the kitchen. At night the ceiling was black with them. They seemed like a moving net. When the provisions were brought, the flies threw themselves upon them—a live mass, pushing, jostling, quarrelling. The best morsels fell to the lot of the bold and the strong. The rest had the remains.

Pascha, the cook, was right. There were too many flies. Then something horrible happened. One morning, Pascha brought along with the provisions a package of very tasty papers—that is, she made them tasty, when she spread them out on plates, by moistening them with warm water and sprinkling sugar over them.

“There is a fine treat for the flies,” said Pascha, putting the plates where they could be seen. Without Pascha’s saying anything, the flies knew at once that this





was a special treat for them. Buzzing gaily, they threw themselves upon the new dainty. Our Fly tried to get into a plate, but she was pushed rudely aside.

“No pushing, please,” said she, offended, “I’m not one of those greedy ones, you know. You are quite rude.”

Then something quite terrible happened. Thousands of flies died. The greediest were the first to succumb. They crawled about as if drunk and then fell to the ground, dead. In the morning, Pascha swept up a large plate full of dead flies. Only the most sensible ones remained alive. Among these was our Fly.

“No papers for us,” buzzed the surviving flies. “We don’t want them.”

The next day the same thing happened. Of all the sensible flies only the most sensible remained alive. But Pascha still



complained, "There is no living with these flies about."

Then the gentleman they called Papa brought home three very pretty glass bowls and filled them with beer. This time even the most sensible flies were caught. It turned out that these bowls were nothing but fly-catchers. The flies, attracted by the smell of beer, were caught in the bowls and perished.

"That's good," said Pascha approvingly. She had turned out to be the most heartless of women, rejoicing at others' misfortunes.

"There isn't anything good about that," said Little Fly. "If people had wings like flies and someone were to set a fly-catcher as big as a house, they, too, would be caught."

Our Fly, learning from the bitter experiences of the sensible flies, ceased to





trust people. They only seem kind, these people; while, in reality, they are busy with just one thing—to cheat poor trusting flies. To tell the truth, human beings are the slyest and cruelest of animals.

Through all these misfortunes the number of flies decreased considerably. Then followed another calamity. Suddenly summer was gone. Rains began to fall. Cold winds blew. The weather was very disagreeable.

“Is summer really gone?” asked the few remaining flies. “How could it have passed so quickly. It doesn’t seem quite fair. We have hardly had time to live and autumn is already upon us.”

This was worse than poison paper or glass fly-catchers. There was only one escape from the coming bad weather—to seek shelter with one’s bitterest enemy, Master Man. Alas, now the windows

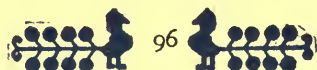


were closed all day long and only the ventilators were occasionally open! The very sun seemed to shine just to deceive the trustful house flies.

For instance, what do you think of this picture? It is morning. The sun is gaily peeping into all the windows as if inviting the flies into the garden. You would think summer was returning. And what happens? The trustful flies fly through the ventilator into the garden. True, the sun *is* shining, but it gives no heat. They try to return to the house but the ventilator has been closed. Thus many flies perished in the cold autumn nights.

“No, I no longer believe,” said our Little Fly, “I have no faith in anything. Since even the sun deceives me, I believe in nothing.”

It is understood that with the coming of the fall all flies experienced the same un-





happy moods. They became very disagreeable. Not a sign of their former gayety remained. They became gloomy, indolent and dissatisfied. Some of them even began to bite, which they had never been known to do before.

Our Fly's disposition became so bad she didn't know herself. She had always been so sorry for other flies. Now when they perished, she thought only of herself. She was even ashamed to speak the thoughts that were in her mind, "Let them perish, then there will be more left for me." In the first place, there were not many warm corners where a decent fly could spend the winter. In the second place, the other flies were very annoying, always in the way, snatching from under her nose the very best tidbits, and behaving badly in general. Besides, it was time for them to rest.

The flies seemed to understand the cruel





thoughts of our Fly and they fell by the hundreds. They didn't seem to die—just to fall asleep. With each day their number grew smaller and smaller. There was no longer any need of poison paper or glass fly-catchers. But all this was not enough to satisfy our Fly. She wanted to be the only fly left in the world.

III



HERE came a very happy day. One morning our Fly woke up quite late. She had felt a curious weariness for a long time and preferred to remain immovable in her corner under the stove. And now she felt that something unusual was going to happen. She flew to the window. The first snow had fallen! The ground was covered with a brilliant, white, shining sheet.



“Oh, this must be winter!” Our Fly knew at once. “Winter is all white, like a piece of sugar.”

Then our Fly noticed that all the other flies had disappeared. The poor things could not survive the first frost and dropped off to sleep wherever they happened to be. In former days, our Fly would have felt very sorry for them. But now she thought, “This is splendid. Now I am really the only one. No one will eat my jam, my sugar, my crumbs. This is fine.”

She flew through all the rooms to convince herself that she was the only fly left. Now she could do anything she pleased. It was so nice. The house was so warm. Winter was there, out of doors; but inside the house it was bright, warm, and cozy, especially in the evening when the candles and lamps were lighted. A slight misfortune occurred when the first lamp was





lighted. Our Fly once more flew against it and was almost scorched to death.

"This must be the winter fly-trap," said our Fly, rubbing her burnt legs. "Now you can't fool me. I know too much. You wish to burn the Last Fly, do you? Well, that's the last thing that I want. There is also a hot stove in the kitchen. Don't I know that, too, is a fly-catcher?"

The Last Fly was happy for a few days only. Then suddenly she felt lonely, so lonely, so very lonely. Of course, she was warm and there was plenty to eat, but still she was unhappy. She flew and rested and ate. She flew again, but she felt lonelier than ever.

"Oh, how lonely I am!" she buzzed in a thin, pitiful voice, flying from one room to the other. "If there were only one other fly here! The meanest, the worst of them, but only one fly!"





No one seemed to understand the complaints of the Last Fly and this of course made her cross. She flew about like one mad, alighting on this one's nose, on that one's ear, or back and forth in front of people's eyes.

"Heavens, can't you understand? I am quite alone in the world and I am very, very lonely," she would buzz at every one. "You don't even know how to fly. How can you know loneliness? If someone were only to play with me! But no, how can they? What can be clumsier and heavier than a human being? The ugliest creatures I have ever met."

The Last Fly annoyed the dog and the cat and everybody else. She was most hurt when she heard Aunt Olga say, "Please don't touch the Last Fly. Leave her alone. Let her live through the winter." This was insulting! It sounded as





if she was not even considered a fly. "Let her live." What a kindness!

"But I am so lonely! Maybe I don't want to live. That's all there's to it."

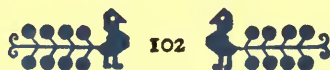
The Last Fly was so angry at everybody that she grew frightened at herself. She flew, she buzzed, she squeaked, she squealed. The spider in the corner finally took pity on her and said:

"Dear fly, come to me. See how pretty my web is!"

"Thank you very much," said the Last Fly. "Are you my new friend? I know what your pretty cob web means. You were probably a human being at one time who is now pretending to be a spider."

"You know I wish you well," said the spider.

"Oh, you ugly creature!" said the Fly. "To eat the Last Fly means to wish me well, hey?"



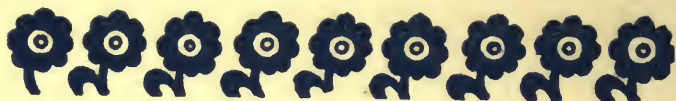


They had a great quarrel. Nevertheless, it was lonely, too lonely for words to tell. The Fly was bitter against everybody. She grew weary and in a loud voice announced:

“Since all of you refuse to understand how lonely I am, I will sit here in the corner the whole winter through. That’s all there is to it! Yes, I will stay in the corner and nothing will make me leave it. So there!”

When she returned to her corner she cried, thinking of last summer’s gladness. There had been so many merry flies. How foolish she had been to desire to be left alone. That had been a great mistake.

The winter seemed endless and Last Fly was beginning to think that summer would never return. She wished to die and she wept quietly. Surely human beings invented winter. They always



seemed to think of things that harmed flies. Perhaps it was Aunt Olga who had hidden away the summer, as she did sugar and jam. Last Fly was almost dead with despair when something unexpected happened.

One day she was sitting in her corner, as was her custom, when she suddenly heard, "Buzz! Buzz!" She couldn't believe her own ears at first and then she thought that someone was fooling her. And then—heavens!—what was that? A real live fly! A Fly, very young, flew past. It was just born and it was glad.

"Spring is coming! Spring is coming!" it buzzed.

How glad the two were to see each other! They embraced and kissed, and licked each other's feelers. The Last Fly talked for days, telling her new friend what an awful winter she had spent and



how lonely she had been. The young fly only laughed in her thin little voice. She couldn't understand how anyone could be lonely.

"Spring! Spring!" she joyfully repeated.

When Aunt Olga ordered the winter windows removed and Verotchka leaned out of the first open window, Last Fly knew what was happening.

"Now, I know it all," buzzed Last Fly, flying out of the window. "We flies make the summer."



THE STORY OF A BLACK-HEADED CROW AND A LITTLE YELLOW CANARY

I



THE Black-Headed Crow sat in a birch tree, pecking at a twig. Peck! Peck! She cleaned her bill, looked around, and suddenly cawed, "Caw! Caw!"





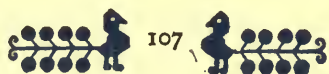
The drowsy cat, Vaska, sitting on a fence, almost fell off with fright at the noise and growled:

“What is the matter with you, Black-head? The Lord has given you some voice! What are you happy about?”

The Crow answered, “Leave me alone. Don’t you see I’m busy? Caw! Caw! Caw! So much to do, so much to do.”

“You poor thing,” laughed Vaska.

“Keep still, you lazy thing. Your sides must be all worn out with lying about, forever baking in the sun; while I know no rest from early morning. Look at me. Just see what I’ve done today. I perched on ten roofs, flew over half the town, peeped into every corner and hole there is, and now I must fly up the church steeple, visit the market, and dig a little in the garden. But I’m really wasting time talk-





ing to you. Too busy! Too busy! Caw! Caw! Caw!"

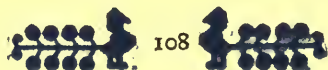
The Crow pecked her beak for the last time against the twig, shook her feathers out and was just ready to fly off when she heard a terrible noise. A flock of sparrows was noisily chasing a tiny little yellow bird.

"Catch her! Catch her!" squawked the sparrows.

"What's happened? Whither away?" cawed the Crow, following the sparrows.

The Crow flapped her wings ten times and caught up with the sparrows. The tiny yellow bird, completely exhausted, dropped into the little garden overgrown with bushes of lilacs, currants and syringa, to hide from the pursuing sparrows. The little yellow bird hid under a bush and there was the Crow.

"Who are you?" cawed the Crow.





The sparrows scattered over that bush like a handful of peas. They were furious with the little yellow bird and wanted to peck her to death.

“What do you want with her?” asked the Crow.

“Why is she yellow?” peeped the sparrows in chorus.

The Crow looked at the little yellow bird. She certainly was all yellow. He jerked his head and said:

“Oh, you mischiefs! Why, it isn’t a bird at all! There never was a bird like this! However, all you clear out. I must speak with this curiosity that pretends to be a bird.”

The sparrows piped, chatted, and were very angry, but they had to clear out. Conversations with a Crow are always very brief. He can peck you to death, you know.



After chasing the sparrows, the Crow questioned the little yellow bird that was breathing heavily and looking pitifully at him with her little black eyes.

“Who are you?” asked the Crow.

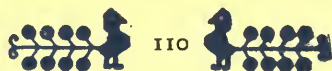
“I am a canary.”

“No fooling now, or you will get the worst of it. Remember, if it had not been for me, the sparrows would have pecked you to death.”

“But I am a canary.”

“Where do you come from?” asked the Crow.

“I lived in a cage. I was born in a cage. I grew up in a cage. But I always wanted to fly about like other birds. The cage hung near the window and I always watched other birds. They looked so happy and my cage seemed so small. Well, one day when the little girl, Verotchka, brought my cup of water, she







left the door open and I flew out. I flew about the room first and then I flew out through the open window."

"What were you doing in a cage?" said the Crow.

"I am a singer, you know."

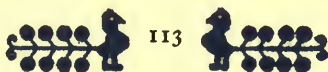
"Just sing for me, then," said the Crow.

The Canary sang. The Crow, with his head tilted to one side, listened and wondered.

"You call this singing?" he exclaimed. "Ha! Ha! Ha! How foolish were your masters to feed you for such singing. If they fed anyone, why should it not have been a real bird like me? Just a while ago I cawed and that rascal Vaska almost fell off the fence. That's what I call singing."

"I know Vaska, a most awful beast! Many a time he softly crept to my cage, his green eyes burning, his claws out."

"To some, he seems fierce, but not to





others. That he is sly, is true, but there is nothing fierce about him. However, we can talk about this later, for somehow I cannot yet believe that you are a real bird."

"But, Aunty, I am a bird. I am a real bird. All canaries are birds, you know."

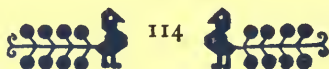
"Very well. We shall see. How do you expect to make a living?"

"I don't need very much, really. A few seeds, a bit of sugar and a bit of toast. That is all."

"What a lady you are! A bit of sugar indeed! You can do without sugar. As for seeds, those might be found. On the whole, I like you. Do you want to live with me? I have a splendid nest in the birch tree."

"Thank you. But how about the sparrows?"

"If you live with me, no one will dare to






touch you. Not only the sparrows, but even sly Vaska knows my character well. I don't like fooling."

The Canary at once took courage and flew off with the Crow. Yes, the nest was fine. If there were only some toast and a wee bit of sugar!

II

O the Canary and the Crow lived together in one nest. Although the Crow liked to grumble occasionally, on the whole she was not unkind. Her chief fault was that she envied everybody and very often considered herself abused.

"Will you tell me why the foolish hens are better than I? Just see how they are cared for, fed and watched," she would complain to the Canary. "Then look at the pigeons. Of what use are they? and



still look at the handfuls of oats they get. They are so foolish. Yet whenever I come near I am chased from every corner. Is this just? And I'm scolded, too. Haven't you noticed that I'm nicer than other birds and much prettier, too? However, one should not say such things about oneself. Don't you think so?"

The Canary agreed with everything.

"Yes, you are a big bird," she would say.

"Here you are. They keep parrots in cages and look after them. Can you see why the foolish parrot is better than I? He only knows how to scream and chatter and no one can really understand what he says."

"I know. We had a parrot that every one grew tired of," said the Canary.

"Yes, one can think of many birds that live, no one knows why. For instance, the



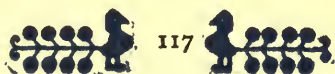
starling; it comes like a mad thing no one knows whence, stays through the summer, and flies away again. There are also the swallows, the bluebirds and nightingales, but one can't really count all this rubbish. There isn't a single really desirable bird. Why, just as soon as there is a cold breeze, all of them seem to fly away, the Lord knows where."

In reality, the Crow and the Canary did not understand each other. The Canary could not understand a life of freedom; the Crow could not understand a life of captivity.

"Aunty, has no one ever thrown you a bit of seed," wondered the Canary, "not a single grain?"

"How foolish you are to talk of seeds, when I have to dodge sticks and stones. People are very cruel."

With this, the Canary could never





agree, because people had always been kind to her. She thought that the Crow imagined these things, but the Canary was soon to see the cruelty of people. Once, perched on a fence, she heard a heavy stone whizz over her very head. Some school boys walking past the fence saw the Crow and couldn't resist throwing a stone at her.

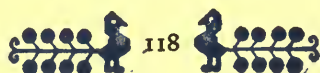
"Now, have you seen for yourself?" asked the Crow, climbing upon the roof. "People are always like that."

"Perhaps you have done something to annoy them, Auntie."

"Nothing at all. They are just cruel and all of them hate me."

The Canary felt very sorry for the poor Crow whom no one loved. It must be very hard to live under such circumstances.

On the whole, there were many enemies.

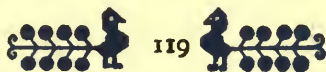




For instance, Vaska, with his oily eyes, watching the birds and always feigning sleep. The Canary saw with her own eyes how he caught a young inexperienced sparrow; one could only see the feathers flying, and hear the bones crackling. Horrible! Horrible! Then the hawks, too; very fine to watch them as they sail up into the air, but suddenly you see them, like a heavy stone dropping to the ground, and before you know it, a chick is in their claws.

All this the Canary saw. The Crow, however, was not afraid of either cats or hawks. She often had a notion to have a taste of a young bird herself. At first, the Canary could not believe this, but she really did see this with her own eyes. A flock of sparrows were chasing the Crow, chattering and screaming.

"Let her go! Let her go!" screamed





the sparrows, beside themselves, flying over the Crow's nest in a frenzy. "This is awful! This is real robbery!"

The Crow hid deep in her nest and the Canary saw with horror a bleeding sparrow, dead.

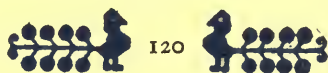
"Aunty, what are you doing?"

"Keep still!" said the Crow.

Her eyes were horrible. They seemed to burn. The Canary had to shut her own eyes for fear she would see the Crow gobbling up the poor little victim.

"Some day she may even eat me," thought the Canary.

Having satisfied her hunger, the Crow grew kinder and kinder. She cleaned her bill, perched comfortably and fell into a sweet slumber. The Canary noticed that the Crow was very greedy and not very particular as to what she ate.



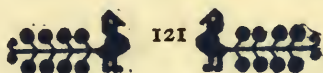


Sometimes she would carry a piece of bread, a bit of decayed meat, or some leavings found in a dump hole. The dump hole the Crow liked best, but the Canary could never understand the pleasure of digging in such places.

In fact, it was hard to blame the Crow. She alone ate in one day food enough for twenty canaries. The Crow had only one care—food. Perched on some roof, she was always on the lookout for food.

When the Crow was too lazy to search for food, she would resort to slyness. If she saw a flock of sparrows tearing at something, she would fly right over to them, pretending she was just passing by, cawing with her whole might, "Caw! Caw! I'm busy! I'm busy!"

She would then swoop down, grab the booty, and that was the end of it.





“But it isn’t a bit nice to take food away from others,” once remarked the indignant Canary.

“Isn’t it? But what if I am hungry?”

“Others are hungry, too,” said the Canary.

“Well, let them look out for themselves. It is easy enough for you, the pets, cuddled in cages. We have to get our own food. You and the sparrows—how much do you need? A few grains and you are satisfied for the whole day.”

III



UMMER passed unnoticed. The sun seemed to grow colder, the day shorter. Rains began to fall. A cold wind blew. The Canary felt herself a most unfortunate bird, especially when it rained. But the Crow, did not seem to mind it.





“What if it does rain? It will stop,” said the Crow.

“But it is so cold, too cold, Aunty,” said the Canary.

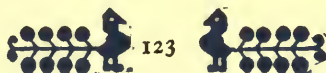
It was especially hard at night. The little wet Canary would shiver with cold and the Crow would scold at her.

“Oh, you baby! What will you do when the real frost comes and the snow falls?”

The Crow was puzzled. “What sort of bird is this that is afraid of rain, wind and cold?” And she began to doubt once more whether the Canary was a real bird, after all. “Surely she must be pretending.”

“Truly, Aunty, I am a real bird.” the Canary would assert with tears in her eyes, “even if I do feel cold sometimes.”

“Look out, now! It always seems to me that you are only pretending to be a bird,” said the Crow.





“Honestly, Aunty, I’m not pretending.”

Sometimes the Canary would try to think about her future. Perhaps it would have been better to have stayed in the cage, after all. There it was warm and one always had plenty to eat.

Several times she flew up to the window, where her old cage hung. Two new canaries looked out at her and envied her.

“Oh, how cold it is!” pitifully piped the freezing Canary. “How I would like to be in there with you.”

One morning the Canary looked out of the Crow’s nest. She was astonished at the dreary sight. Over night, the ground had been covered with the first snow. Everything was white, but, saddest of all, the snow covered all the grains on which the Canary fed. There remained only the mountain ash berry, but she couldn’t pos-



sibly eat that! It was too sour! As for the Crow, she ate that, saying, "Very fine!"

After starving two whole days, the Canary was in despair.

"What is going to happen to me? I will die of hunger," thought the Canary.

The next day the Canary sat wondering when suddenly she saw coming into the garden the very same boys who had thrown stones at the Crow. They spread a net on the ground and covered it with very tasty bird seed then went away.

"These boys aren't so bad," said the happy Canary, looking at the seeds. "Look, Aunty, the boys have brought me some food."

"Very fine food, I must say," croaked the Crow. "Don't you dare stick your bill in there! Do you hear me! If you try to get that seed, you will be caught in the net."



“And what will happen then?” asked the Canary.

“Why, they will put you into a cage again,” said the Crow.

The Canary grew thoughtful. She wanted food, but she did not want a cage. Of course, it was cold and at times there was little to eat. Still, life in freedom was better, especially when it did not rain. For several days the Canary was strong. But hunger was stronger. Finally she just had to yield to her longing for food. She was caught in the net.

“Help! Help!” piped the Canary pitifully. “I will never do it again. It is better to die of hunger than to live in a cage.”

The Canary now thought that there was nothing in the whole world nicer than the Crow’s nest. Of course, it was cold and occasionally one had no food. But there



was freedom. One could fly about wherever one pleased. She wept, waiting for the boys to come to put her into the cage. But as luck would have it, the Crow passed by that very moment and spied the Canary in difficulty.

“You are foolish,” scolded the Crow. “Didn’t I tell you not to touch those seeds?”

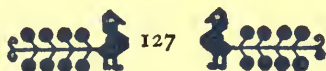
“Aunty, I’ll never do it again.”

The Crow was just in time. The boys were already on their way to fetch their victim. The Crow tore the net quickly with her beak. The Canary was free.

The boys chased the Crow, throwing sticks and stones and scolding her for some time.

“How nice it is to be free,” chirped the glad Canary, finding herself once more in the Crow’s nest.

“Of course, it’s nice. You’d better take





care if you want to stay free,” scolded the Crow.

The Canary, safe in the Crow’s nest, started life anew. Never again did she complain of either cold or hunger.

One day, the Crow flew away in search of food and stayed all night in the field. When she returned she found the little Canary lying in the nest with her little legs up—cold and stiff.

The Crow tilted her head to one side and looking very closely at the Canary, she said:

“Well, I told you you were not a real bird.”



THE WISEST OF ALL

I



URKEY GOBBLER awoke as usual before any one else. It was still dark. He woke up his wife and said:

“Am I not the wisest of all?”



Turkey Hen was not quite awake. She coughed and then answered:

"Oh, you are very wise. Khe! Khe! Khe! Who does not know that? Khe! Khe! Khe!"

"No, it isn't enough to say 'wisest of all,'" said Turkey Gobbler. "There are plenty of wise birds, but the wisest of all is one, and that is I."

"The wisest of all! Khe! Khe! Khe! The wisest of all! Khe! Khe! Khe!"

"That's right," said Turkey Gobbler.

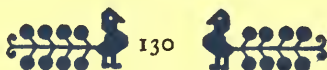
A little cross, Turkey Gobbler added in a voice that other birds might hear:

"Do you know, I think that I am not respected enough."

"You only imagine that. Khe! Khe!"

Turkey Hen calmed him, at the same time smoothing her feathers that had ruffled over night.

"You only think that, for one could not



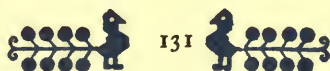


imagine a wiser bird than you. Khe! Khe!"

"What about the Gander? Oh, I see everything. Of course, he is silent most of the time, never saying anything directly, but I feel that silently he does not respect me."

"Don't pay any attention to him," said Turkey Hen. "He isn't worth it. Khe! Khe! Haven't you noticed how foolish he is?"

"Any one can see that," said Turkey Gobbler. "It is written all over his face, 'Foolish Gander,' and nothing else. But it isn't really the Gander, for, after all, can one be angry with a fool? The Rooster, for instance. The most ordinary Rooster. Did you hear him scream at me the other day? He screamed so loudly that all the neighbors heard him. It seemed to me he





was saying I was foolish or something like that."

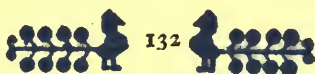
"How strange you are," said Turkey Hen, astonished. "Don't you know why Rooster screams?"

"Why?" asked Turkey Gobbler.

"Khe! Khe! Khe! It's very simple and everybody knows it. You're a Cock and he's a Cock. Only he is a very, very common Cock, while you are a real beyond-the-sea Indian Cock. That's why he screams with envy. Every bird wishes to be an Indian Cock. Khe! Khe!"

"But that's hard to be, mother. Ha! ha! ha! Some ambition for a common little Rooster to become a Turkey Gobbler! No, sir. That never can be!" said Turkey Gobbler.

Turkey Hen was a very modest, kind bird. She was always worried when Turkey Gobbler quarreled with anyone.





This morning, he was hardly awake when he was thinking with whom to pick a quarrel and fight. He was a restless bird, though not unkind. Turkey Hen was often hurt when other birds made sport of Turkey Gobbler, calling him, "Old Stuck-Up" or "Chatterbox" or "Empty-Head." They were partly right, of course. But then, there are no birds without faults. That's why it is pleasant to find in another bird even the tiniest shortcomings.

The birds, now awakened, proceeded from the poultry house into the barnyard, and at once there arose a horrible clatter. The hens made the most noise; they ran around the yard, they climbed on the kitchen windows, and they screamed, beside themselves,

"Cut-a-cut! Cut-a-cut! Cut-a-cut!
We are hungry! Cook Matryona must





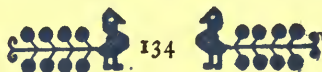
either be dead or she wants to starve us to death."

"Ladies and gentlemen, have patience!" remarked Gander, standing on one leg. "Look at me. I, too, am hungry, but I don't shout in the way you do. If I were to open my mouth and scream, 'Quack! Quack! or louder, 'QUACK! QUACK! QUACK!' . . ."

Gander quacked so loudly that Cook Matryona awakened immediately.

"It's easy for him to talk of patience," grumbled a Duck. "His throat is like a megaphone. If I had a neck as long as his, and a bill as strong as his, I'd also preach patience. I would also have my food before any one else, and preach patience to the others. We know Master Gander's patience."

Rooster, supporting Duck in this, screamed, "Yes, it's easy for Gander to





talk of patience. Who pulled out two of my finest tail feathers yesterday? It is dishonorable to grab hold of a bird's tail. Of course, we quarreled slightly and I won't deny that I intended to pick Gander's head, but then I was to blame, not my poor tail. Am I not right, ladies and gentlemen?"

Hungry birds, like hungry people, become unjust—just because they are hungry.

II



TURKEY GOBBLER, through sheer pride, never scrambled for food like other birds. He always waited patiently for Matryona to chase some greedy bird away and to call him.

It was the same this morning. Turkey Gobbler strutted along the side of the



fence, pretending to be looking for something.

“Khe! Khe! I am so hungry,” complained Turkey Hen, stepping along behind her husband. “Cook Matryona has already strewn the oats and now, I think, the leftover cereal of yesterday is coming. Khe! Khe! Oh, how I do love cereal! I think I could eat nothing but cereal the rest of my life. I even dream of cereal sometimes.”

Turkey Hen liked to complain when she was hungry and she demanded sympathy from Turkey Gobbler. Compared with other birds, she looked like an old woman, humping her back and coughing. She even walked with a broken gait, as if her legs didn't belong to her.

“Yes, it would be nice to have some cereal,” said Turkey Gobbler, agreeing with her. “But a wise bird never scram-





bles for food. Am I not right? If my master does not feed me, then I die of hunger. Just let him find another Turkey Gobbler like me!"

"There is not another like you," said Turkey Hen.

"Of course not," said her husband.

"In reality, cereal is nothing. It is not a question of cereal, but of Matryona. Am I not right? As long as there is Matryona there will be cereal. Everything in the world depends upon Matryona—oats, cereal, grains and crusts of bread."

In spite of these discussions, Turkey Gobbler began to feel the pangs of hunger. He became very sad indeed.

All the birds had been fed, and still Matryona did not call him. Could she have forgotten him? That would be no joke.

Then something happened which





caused Turkey Gobbler to forget his hunger.

A young hen, walking near the barn, began to call, "Cut-a-cut! Cut-a-cut! Cut-a-cut!" All the other hens took up the call at once, screaming with all their might, "Cut-a-cut! Cut-a-cut!" Loudest of all was Rooster, of course, with his "Cock-a-doodle-doo! Who's there?"

Attracted by the noise, all the birds ran toward the barn. There they saw a most unusual sight. Close to the barn, in a hole, lay something gray and round and all covered with sharp needles.

"Just an ordinary stone," said one.

"It's moving," exclaimed Little Hen. "I also thought it was a stone, but it moved when I came close, and it seems to me that I saw eyes. Stones have no eyes, you know."

"A foolish hen can see anything if she is





frightened," remarked Turkey Gobbler.
"Perhaps it . . . it . . ."

He was interrupted by Gander, who screamed:

"It's a mushroom. I have seen mushrooms just like this, only they had no needles."

Everybody laughed loudly at the Gander.

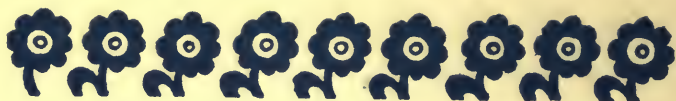
"It looks more like a hat," someone ventured to say, but this remark, too, met with laughter.

"A hat has no eyes."

"Let us waste no time in empty conversation. Let us act," decided the Rooster for everybody. "Hey, you thing full of needles, you speak for yourself! What sort of beast are you? I like no fooling. Do you hear?"

As there was no answer, the Rooster felt insulted, and threw himself upon the un-





known offender. He tried to peck him once or twice but stepped aside, abashed.

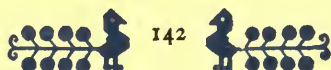
"It is nothing but a huge pine cone," he said. "Nothing tasty about it. Would someone like to try?"

Everybody chattered, saying the first thing that occurred to him.

There was no end to the different opinions. Turkey Gobbler was the only silent one. All the others chattered while he listened to their foolishness. They clattered and chattered for a long time, until someone shouted:

"Ladies and gentlemen, we are wasting time, and needlessly tiring ourselves, when we have Turkey Gobbler with us. He knows everything."

"I do, indeed!" said Turkey Gobbler, spreading his tail and puffing out his red wattles.





"If you do, then tell us who is this strange creature."

"And if I don't want to tell you? Just refuse to tell you?" said Turkey Gobbler.

Then all the birds began to beg him to tell them.

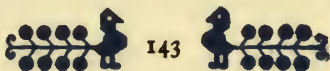
"You are our wisest bird, Turkey Gobbler. Please tell us. It will cost you nothing."

Turkey Gobbler plumed himself for a time and finally said:

"Very well. I will. Yes, I will tell you. But first you must answer me—what do you think of me?"

"Who doesn't know? You are the wisest of all!" they answered in chorus. "Isn't there a saying, 'As wise as a Turkey?' "

"Then you do respect me?" asked Turkey Gobbler.





“Of course we do. All of us respect you.”

Turkey Gobbler plumed himself some more, puffed up his red wattles, strutted around the strange beast three times and finally said:

“This is . . . So you want to know what this is?”

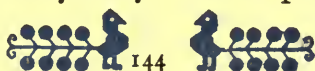
“We do! Please tell us! Don’t torture us any longer!” said the others.

“This . . . but it is creeping!” said Turkey Gobbler.

The fowls felt like laughing at him when a giggle was heard and a thin little voice said:

“There is the wisest bird of all! He! He! He!” And from under the needles appeared a black snout and two tiny black eyes. The tiny black snout sniffed the air and said:

“Hello, everybody! Is it possible that





you do not recognize Porcupine—Porcupine Gray? Pardon me . . . but what a funny Turkey Gobbler you have! I really do not know how to say it politely . . . but your Turkey Gobbler is stupid.”

III



VERYBODY was horrified at this insult that Porcupine hurled at Turkey Gobbler. Of course, Turkey Gobbler did say a foolish thing just now, but it does not mean that Porcupine has any right to insult him.

It is very rude to enter a house and then to insult the master. You must admit that a Turkey Gobbler is a very dignified and imposing bird. There is surely no comparison between him and a Gray Porcupine.



Suddenly, everybody sided with Turkey Gobbler and there arose a terrific clatter.

“Porcupine probably thinks that all of us are foolish,” said Rooster, flapping his wings.

“He insulted all of us! If any one is foolish, it is surely the Porcupine himself,” said Gander, stretching his neck. “I noticed that at once.”

“How can mushrooms be foolish?” answered Porcupine.

“Ladies and gentlemen, we are wasting time talking to him,” shouted Rooster. “He will not understand us, anyway. If, instead, you, Mr. Gander, were to grab his needles on one side, and Master Gobbler and I on the other side, we would at once know who is the wiser, for you cannot hide brains under foolish needles.”

“I am ready,” replied Gander. “It would be better still if I were to grab his



needles in the back and you, Master Rooster, pecked his snout. Then, ladies and gentlemen, it will be seen who is the wisest."

Turkey Gobbler was silent all this time. At first, he was overwhelmed by the Porcupine's impudence and he did not know what answer to make. Then Turkey Gobbler grew so angry, so angry that he was horrified at himself. His first wish was to throw himself upon the offender and tear him into tiny bits. Then would the world see and be convinced what a strict and serious bird a Turkey Gobbler is. He even started in Porcupine's direction, blowing himself up more and more, and just as he was about to throw himself upon Porcupine everybody began shouting and scolding the stranger. Turkey Gobbler stopped and waited patiently to see the end of it all.



When Rooster suggested that they grab Porcupine's needles and drag him in different directions, Turkey Gobbler stopped his ardor.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said he, "perhaps all this can be settled amicably. Yes, it seems to me there is a little misunderstanding here. Leave the whole thing to me."

"Very well. Let us wait," agreed the Rooster, unwillingly. He was eager to fight Porcupine. "I know nothing will come of it."

"This is my affair," answered Turkey Gobbler calmly. "Just stay around and hear what I say."

All the birds formed a ring around Porcupine and waited.

Turkey Gobbler walked around the stranger, coughed and said:

"Listen, Mr. Porcupine. Let us have a



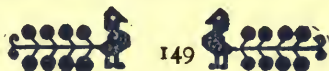
serious explanation. In general, I do not like domestic troubles."

"Heavens! How wise! How wise he is!" thought Turkey Hen, listening to her husband, silent with admiration.

"First of all, I want you to understand that you are in respectable, well-behaved society," said Turkey Gobbler, "and that means something. Yes, you may consider it an honor to get into our company."

"True! True!" shouted several.

"But this is between ourselves. The main thing is not . . ." here Turkey Gobbler stopped, was silent a moment for better effect, then continued, "Yes, the main thing is—did you really think that we had no idea what a Porcupine was? I have no doubt that Gander was only joking when he took you for a mushroom. And I can say the same of what Rooster and the





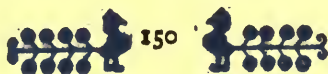
others said. Am I not right, ladies and gentlemen?"

"You certainly are, Turkey Gobbler," shouted the fowls in a voice so loud, that poor Gray Porcupine tucked in her little black snout.

"Oh, how wise he is!" thought Turkey Hen, beginning to understand what her husband was driving at.

"You see, Master Porcupine," continued Turkey Gobbler, "we all like our little jokes. I will not speak for myself. Why not have a little joke? And as I see it, you, Mr. Porcupine, seem also to be of a merry disposition."

"And you guessed right," admitted Porcupine, once more showing his little black snout. "I have such a merry disposition that I cannot sleep at night. Many cannot stand that, but sleeping bores me."





"You will probably agree best with our Rooster, who crows like mad all night," said Turkey Gobbler.

Everybody suddenly became gay. They all felt Porcupine was there to complete their happiness.

Turkey Gobbler was triumphant at so cleverly getting out of an awkward situation caused by Porcupine's laughing in his face and calling him stupid.

"Now Mr. Porcupine," said Turkey Gobbler, winking, "confess that even you were joking when you said that I was not a wise bird."

"Of course, I was joking," said Porcupine, reassuring him. "I have a merry disposition. I love to joke."

"Yes, yes, I was quite sure of that. Ladies and gentlemen, have you heard him?" asked Turkey Gobbler.





“Of course, we did. No one could doubt it. He was joking.”

Turkey Gobbler bent close to Porcupine's ear and whispered:

“I want to tell you a horrible secret. But only on one condition—don't breathe it to a soul. It is true . . . I am a little ashamed to talk about myself . . . but how can I help it? I am the wisest bird! At times, it even embarrasses me, but as the wise Russians say, ‘You can't hide an awl in a sack.’ Please not a word of this to anyone!”





THE STORY OF LITTLE MILK, LITTLE CEREAL AND GRAY KITTEN, MOORKA

I



T was wonderful. It was wonderful that it happened every day. As soon as Cook placed the pot of milk and the earthenware oatmeal pan upon the stove, it would all



begin. At first, there was silence; then conversation.

“I am Little Milk.”

“And I am Little Cereal.”

At first, conversation was carried on in whispers. But gradually both Little Cereal and Little Milk would grow more and more excited.

“I AM LITTLE MILK!”

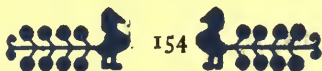
“AND I AM LITTLE CEREAL!”

The cereal was generally covered with an earthenware cover and she grumbled away in her pot like an old woman. When she grew angry, there came to the top a bubble that burst and said:

“Still, I am Little Cereal. Puff!!”

This boasting was offensive to Little Milk.

“My what a wonder! As if one had never seen oatmeal cereal before!” and Little Milk would grow more and more





excited until rising to the top in a foam, she tried to get out from the pot. No sooner would Cook turn her head away than Little Milk would run all over the hot stove.

"Oh, this milk," complained Cook every time it happened. "No sooner do I take my eyes off it than it runs over."

"I can't help my fiery temper," would reply Little Milk, defending herself. "It doesn't make me happy to be angry and to hear the boastings of Cereal, 'I'm Cereal! I'm Cereal! I'm Cereal!' To see her sitting there in her pan and grumbling makes me angrier and angrier."

It happened sometimes that, in spite of the cover, Little Cereal would escape from her pan and creep along the stove, forever repeating:

"I'm Cereal! I'm Cereal! I'm Cereal! Z-h-h! Z-h-h!"



Of course, this did not happen every day, but it did happen, and each time, Cook in despair would say:

“Oh, this Cereal! It is amazing how it will not stay in the pan.”

II



As a rule, Cook was excited. Of course, there were plenty of reasons for her agitation. For instance, there was Kitty Moorka. He was a very beautiful cat and Cook loved him very much. In the morning, Moorka would follow at the Cook's heels and meow so pitifully that it would melt a heart of stone.

“Isn't your belly ever filled?” asked Cook, astonished, chasing the cat. “Just think of all that liver you ate last night.”

“But that was yesterday,” answered



Moorka, astonished in his turn. "To-day, I am hungry again. Meow."

"Why don't you catch mice if your're hungry? Lazy! That's what you are!"

"Talking is very easy. I'd like to see you catch a mouse," Moorka defended himself. "However, I always try hard. Who caught a mouse last week? Who had a scratch the full length of his nose? That's the kind of rat I almost caught. Then she grabbed hold of my nose. It's easy to talk of catching mice. Indeed!"

After eating his liver, Moorka would sit somewhere near the stove where it was warm, close his eyes and doze sweetly.

"I hope you're full, now," said Cook. "Even your eyes are squinting. Well, you lie-on-your-side cat? Always meat, meat, meat!"

"I'm no vegetarian, you know. I can eat meat!" said Moorka, opening just one



eye. "You know I like fish too. It is really pleasant to eat fish, and up to this moment, I can't say which I like better, liver or fish. Out of politeness, I like both. If I were a man, I'd be either a fishman or the butcher-boy who brings us the liver. I'd feed all the cats from every corner of the earth, and I myself would always have my fill."

After eating, Moorka would grow interested in things going on around him, just by way of amusement. He would sit on the window where the starling's cage hung. It was pleasant to watch the foolish bird, hopping back and forth.

"I know you, you old rascal!" the starling would call to him. "You don't have to be watching me!"

"Perhaps I would like to make your acquaintance," said Moorka.

"Yes, I know how you make friends," said the starling. "Didn't I see you eat a



real live baby sparrow? You disgusting brute!”

“I’m not at all disgusting. On the contrary, everybody loves me,” said Moorka. “Come to me. I’ll tell you a fairy tale.”

“Oh, you rascal!” said the starling. “I know what a fine story-teller you are. Haven’t I seen you tell stories to a roasted spring chicken stolen from the kitchen? I know you! You’re a fine one!”

“Just as you like,” said Moorka. “I was thinking only of your pleasure. As for that roasted spring chicken, I did eat him. But anyhow, he wasn’t good for anything else.”

III



VERY morning, Moorka would sit near the stove and listen patiently to the quarrel-
ing of Little Milk and Little Cereal. He could never un-



derstand what it was all about and only blinked his eyes.

“I am Little Milk!”

“I am Little Cereal! Cereal! Cereal!”

“I can’t understand a word of it. No, I don’t understand it. Why are they angry? If I were to repeat, ‘I’m a Cat! I’m a Cat! I’m a Cat!’ could any one take offense at it? I can’t understand it at all. However, I must confess I prefer Milk, especially when she isn’t angry.”

When they quarreled, Little Cereal and Little Milk would become so heated, they ran all over the stove. Then there arose a horrible smell. Cook would rush in, wringing her hands, and crying:

“Whatever shall I do now? I can never turn my head away without having something happen.”

Setting Milk and Cereal aside, Cook went to market for provisions. Moorka







at once made the best of this. He sat down close to Little Milk and said:

"Mistress Milk, please don't be angry." Little Milk grew calmer as the cat watched her. Moorka walked around the spot several times, fixed his whiskers very gently and said:

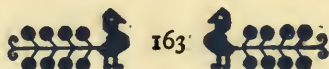
"Listen, folks! It isn't nice to quarrel. Choose me for your judge and I'll settle your affairs very quickly."

The black roach, sitting in the crack of the wall, almost choked with laughter.

"A judge indeed! I must say! Ha! Ha! Ha! It took you to think of it, you old rascal."

But Little Milk and Little Cereal were very glad to have someone settle their quarrel at last, for they really did not know why they were quarreling or what it was all about.

"Very well. Very well. I'll unravel





this," said Kitty Moorka. "And I'll do it honestly. Let us begin with Milk."

He walked around the pot several times, touched Little Milk gently with his paw, blew upon her again and started lapping her up.

"Help Help!" shouted the black roach. "He will lap up all the milk and I will be blamed for it."

When Cook returned from market and looked for the milk, the pot was empty. Cat Moorka was sleeping sweetly near the stove as if nothing had happened.

"You good-for-nothing!" scolded Cook, pulling his ear. "Tell me, who drank the milk?"

It was very painful, but Moorka pretended not to understand anything. He had suddenly become speechless! Then he was thrown out of the kitchen.

Behind the door, he shook himself,





smoothed his ruffled fur, curved his tail and said:

“If I were Cook, all the cats would drink milk day and night. However, I am not angry with my Cook, because this is something she can never really understand!”



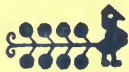
BED TIME

I



LITTLE VEROTCHKA'S one little eye is falling asleep. Verotchka's one little ear is falling asleep.

"Father, are you here?"





"Yes, dear child."

"You know, father, I want to be a Queen."

Verotchka sleeps. She smiles as she sleeps.

There are so many flowers. All of them are smiling. They surround Verotchka's little bed; they whisper and laugh in their thin little voices.

There are crimson flowers, blue flowers, yellow flowers, azure, pink, scarlet, white, as if a rainbow, falling, struck the earth and scattered its living sparks into many-colored lights.

"Verotchka wants to be a Queen," gaily proclaimed the Field Bluebells, swaying on their thin, green stems.

"Oh, how comical she is!" whispered the modest Forget-me-nots.

"Ladies and gentlemen, this affair needs





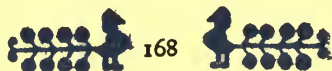
serious discussion,” said the yellow Dandelion pertly.

“What does it mean to be a Queen?” asked the blue Cornflower. “I grew up in a field and I cannot understand your city ways.”

“It’s very simple,” said the pink Carnation. “It is so simple it requires no explaining. A Queen is . . . is . . . is . . . You don’t seem to understand . . . How strange you are! A Queen is like a flower, as pink as I am. In other words, Verotchka wants to be a pink Carnation. Isn’t that simple?”

Everybody laughed gaily. Only the Roses were silent. They were much offended.

“Who doesn’t know that the Queen of Flowers is a Rose—delicate, fragrant, marvellous? And suddenly a mere pink Carnation calls herself a Queen. It’s all nonsense.”





Finally one Rose grew angry and, turning scarlet, she said: "Pardon me. Verotchka wants to be a Rose. A Rose is the Queen because everybody loves her."

"Oh, that is nice," said Dandelion, growing angry. "If that's the case, where do I come in?"

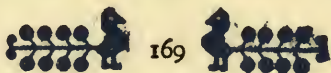
"Dandelion, please don't be angry," pleaded the Wood Bluebells. "It spoils your temper and it is very ugly to be angry. Look at us. We are silent, although we know perfectly well Verotchka wants to be a Wood Bluebell."

II



HERE were many flowers and they all talked calmly without arguing.

All the field flowers, Lilies-of-the-Valley, Violets, Forget-me-nots, Bluebells, Cornflowers, Field Clovers, were so very modest; while the





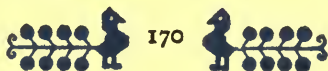
cultivated flowers, like the Roses, Tulips, Lilies, Narcissuses, put on airs like rich children in their Sunday clothes.

Verotchka loved the modest field flowers best. Of these, she would make wreaths and bouquets for the table. They were all so nice.

Verotchka loves us very much," whispered the Violets. "We are the first to arrive in spring. We come here as soon as the snow melts."

"And we, too," said the Lilies-of-the-Valley. "We are also spring flowers. We are not exacting; we come direct from the woods."

"It is not our fault that it is too cold for us to grow in the fields," complained the fragrant curly Stocks and Hyacinths. "We are only visitors here. Our native land is far away, in a warm country where there is no winter. Oh, it is so nice there! We are always longing for our native





land. Your north is so cold. Verotchka loves us, and very much, too.”

“It is also very nice here,” argued the Field Flowers. “Of course, it is very cold at times, but it is healthy. The frost kills our bitterest enemies, worms and bugs of all kinds. If not for frost, life would be very difficult.”

“We also like cold,” said the Roses.

The Azaleas and Camelias agreed with this. They all liked the cold when they were through blooming.

“Ladies and gentlemen, let us talk about our native countries,” suggested White Narcissus. “It will be so interesting. Verotchka will listen, because she loves us all.”

Then they all talked together. Roses, with tears, remembered the Vale of Shiraz in Persia; the Hyacinths recalled Palestine; the Azaleas, America; the Lilies, Egypt; the flowers gathered there were





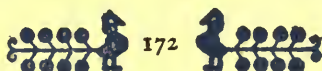
from all corners of the earth and each one could tell many wonderful stories. Most of them came from the South, where there is no winter and much sunshine.

There it is lovely—the summer is eternal. The south is full of enormous trees, wonderful birds, many butterflies, beauties, resembling flying flowers, and flowers resembling butterflies.

“We are only visitors here in the North. At times, we feel very cold,” whispered all these southern flowers.

The native Field Flowers felt sorry for them. Really, it must take a good deal of patience to stand the cold north wind, the cold rain and the falling snow. Of course, the spring snow melts quickly, but it is snow, nevertheless.

“You have one great fault,” exclaimed the Cornflower, after listening to all these stories. “I don’t deny you are, at times,





more beautiful than we, simple Field Flowers. I readily admit that, and then you, too, you are our dear visitors, but your main fault is that you grow only for the few rich, while we grow for everybody. In that we are kinder than you. For example, look at me! You will find me in the hands of every country child. Just see how much pleasure I give to the children of the poor! No one has to pay money to buy me. It takes only a walk in the woods to get me. I grow among the wheat, the rye, and the oats.

III



LITTLE VEROTCHKA listened and wondered at these stories of the flowers. She longed to see everything for herself—all the wonderful countries of which the flowers spoke.



"If I were only a Swallow I would fly thither at once," said Verotchka. "Why haven't I wings! Oh, it would be so nice to be a bird!"

She had hardly finished speaking when a little Lady Bug crept up to her,—a real Lady Bug all red with tiny black spots, a little black head, thin little black feelers and thin little black legs.

"Let us fly, Verotchka," whispered Lady Bug, twitching her feelers.

"But I have no wings, Lady Bug," said Verotchka.

"Get on my back."

"How can I? You are so small, Lady Bug."

"Just watch me," said Lady Bug.

Verotchka watched and wondered more and more. Lady Bug stretched out her strong upper wings and doubled in size; then she opened her thin cobwebby lower





wings and grew still larger. She grew under Verotchka's very eyes and she became so large—large enough for Verotchka to sit comfortably upon her back between her red wings.

"Are you comfortable, Verotchka?" asked Lady Bug.

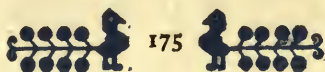
"Very," said Verotchka.

"Then hold on tight," said Lady Bug.

Then they flew. At first Verotchka was afraid and closed her eyes. It seemed to her that it was not she who was flying, but as if cities, woods, rivers and mountains were flying beneath her. Then it seemed as if she had grown small—as small as a pin head and as light as the down of Dandelion.

Lady Bug flew fast and faster, so fast that the air whistled through her wings.

"Look down, Verotchka," said Lady Bug.





Verotchka looked down and clapped her hands.

“Oh, how many Roses—red, yellow, white, pink,” exclaimed Verotchka. The world seemed to be covered with a carpet of swaying Roses. “Let us descend,” begged Verotchka of the Lady Bug.

They descended and Verotchka grew big again, as big as she was before, and Lady Bug grew tiny again.

For a long time Verotchka ran about in the rose-field and gathered a huge bunch of Roses. How beautiful they were! Their perfume made one faint. If one could only carry the rose-field to the North, where Roses were mere visitors!

“Now, let us go further,” said Lady Bug, stretching out her wings again. Again, Lady Bug grew large and larger and Verotchka grew small and smaller.



IV



GAIN they flew. It was all so nice. Above, the sky so blue; beneath, the water still bluer. They flew over a steep rocky shore.

"Will we really fly across the sea?" asked Verotchka.

"Yes. But you must sit still and hold me tight," said Lady Bug.

At first, Verotchka was afraid, but after a while she wasn't. There was nothing but sky and sea. On the sea sailed ships like huge birds with white wings. The little boats looked like flies.

Everything was lovely—so nice. Way yonder was the shore, low, yellow, sandy. It was the mouth of some huge river and near it gleamed a city all white, as if built of sugar. Still beyond, one saw a dead



desert, where stood the Pyramids. Lady Bug descended upon the bank of the river. Upon it grew tall Papyrus and among them were Lilies, wonderful, delicate.

"Your home is very lovely," said Verotchka to the Lilies. "Does winter never come here to you?"

"What is winter?" asked the Lilies, wondering.

"Winter is the time snow falls," said Verotchka.

"And what is snow?" asked the Lilies.

The Lilies even laughed at Verotchka. They thought the little northern girl was making fun of them. It is true that every fall huge flocks of birds from the North visited them and told them about the winter. But these birds had never really seen winter. They were only repeating what they had heard and Verotchka could not





believe that there was no winter, for that meant no need of warm coats or warm shoes.

They flew further. Verotchka wondered no longer at the blue sea, the mountains, the sun-kissed desert and the Hyacinths.

"I'm too warm," complained Verotchka. "You know, Lady Bug, I don't think it's nice to have summer all the time."

"It all depends upon what one is accustomed to," said Lady Bug.

They flew towards high mountains, the tops of which were always white with snow. There it wasn't so warm. Beyond the mountains, stretched deep, dark forests. Under the forest trees, it was dark, for the rays of the sun never penetrated beyond the thick tree tops. Monkeys swung from bough to bough. The woods



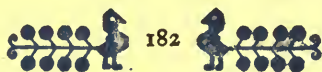
were full of birds—green, yellow, blue. But the most wonderful of all were the flowers growing directly from the tree trunks. There were flowers like fire, flowers of all colors, flowers that looked like birds and butterflies. The whole forest seemed to blaze with many-colored living fires.

“These are Orchids,” explained Lady Bug.

Here it was all a tangle. It was impossible to walk.

They flew further. Beneath them, a huge river spread between green banks. Lady Bug alighted upon a huge white flower that grew in the water. Verotchka had never before seen a flower so large as this.

“This is a holy flower,” explained Lady Bug. “It is called ‘Lotus.’ ”





V



LITTLE VEROTCHKA had seen so much that she finally grew tired and wanted to go home. Home is best.

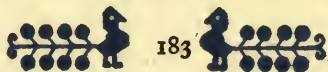
"I love white snow," said Verotchka. "It isn't nice without winter."

Again they flew. The higher they flew, the colder it grew. Soon there appeared beneath them white fields and only the pine woods were green. Verotchka was so happy when she saw the first fir-tree.

"Little Fir-Tree! Little Fir-Tree!" called Verotchka.

"Hello, Verotchka," answered the Little Fir-Tree beneath her.

This was a real Christmas tree. Verotchka knew her at once. That dear Christmas tree! Verotchka bent down to tell her how lovely she was and all of a





sudden she felt herself going down, down, down.

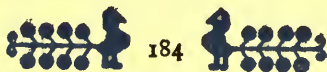
It was frightful. She turned somersaults in the air several times, and then fell right into the soft white snow. Verotchka closed her eyes with fear and didn't know whether she was dead or alive.

"How did you get here, Little One?" asked somebody.

Verotchka opened her eyes and saw a bent, old man, all gray. She knew him at once. It was the same old man who brought Christmas trees and golden stars, boxes of candy and wonderful toys, to the good children. He was so kind, this old man; he picked her up in his arms and covered her with his fur coat, asking her again:

"How did you come here, Little Girl?"

"I travelled on Lady Bug's back, and I saw so much, Grandfather!"





"So, so."

"I know you, Grandfather. You bring Christmas trees to children."

"Yes, yes. I'm fixing one now." And he pointed to a tall pole that didn't look like a Christmas tree at all.

"What sort of Christmas tree is that, Grandfather? It's nothing but a long stick."

"Wait and see," said Grandfather.

Grandfather carried Verotchka into a tiny village almost buried in snow. Only the roofs and chimneys were visible. The country children were all waiting for the old grandfather. They jumped and shouted, when they saw him.

"Christmas tree! Christmas tree!"

They came to the first hut. Grandfather got an unbroken sheaf of oats, tied it to the end of the pole and stuck the pole on the roof. Immediately the tiny birds





that do not go away for the winter flew upon it from all sides and began pecking the seeds.

“It is our Christmas tree,” they shouted.

Suddenly, Verotchka felt very happy. That was the first time she had seen a Christmas tree made for the winter birds.

“What a kind old grandfather!”

One little Sparrow, bustling about more than the others, recognized Verotchka and called out!

“Why, this is Verotchka! I know her very well. Many, many times has she scattered crumbs for me.”

Other Sparrows also recognized her and piped noisily with joy.

Then came another Sparrow that turned out to be the squabbler. He began pushing everybody aside and snatching the best seeds. This was the same Spar-





row who had quarreled with Stickelback. Verotchka knew him at once.

“Hello, Master Sparrow!” she said.

“Is that you, Verotchka? Why, hello!”

Sparrow Squabbler hopped on one leg, winked knowingly with one eye and said to the old man:

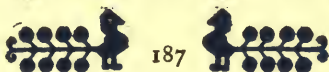
“Why, this is Verotchka, who wants to be the Queen. I myself heard her say that.”

“Do you want to be a Queen, Little One?” asked the Old Man.

“Yes, very much, Grandfather,” said Verotchka.

“Very well,” said the wise old man. “There is nothing simpler. Every Queen is a woman and every woman a Queen. Now go home and tell that to all the other little girls.”

Lady Bug was very glad to get away.





She was afraid that the quarrelsome Sparrow would gobble her up.

So Verotchka and Lady Bug flew home. Faster and faster they flew. At home, all the flowers were waiting for Verotchka. They had been wondering what is a Queen all the time she was away.

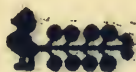


ULLA-LULLABY. Verotchka's one eye is sleeping; the other little eye is open. Verotchka's one little ear is sleeping; the other ear listens.

Now everybody gathered about Verotchka's bed. Bold Rabbit, Bear Mishka, Squabbling Rooster and Sparrow, Black-headed Crow, Stickelback and tiny, tiny Cacinella. They were all there near Verotchka.

"Father, I love them all," whispered Verotchka. "I love even the Black Roach, Father."

Verotchka's other eye is asleep. The other little ear is also asleep. Near Verotchka's bed, the green spring grass grows gaily, the flowers are smiling—many flowers, blue, pink, yellow, azure and scarlet. The green birch bends over Ver-





otchka's bed and whispers something, lovingly.

The sun is shining, the sand is yellow, and the blue sea waves beckon to Verotchka to come to them.

Sleep, Verotchka, and grow strong!
Lulla-Lullaby.



THE END

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